

## *A Review of Getic Poet Ovid in Pont.iv.13*

Yuanfang Zheng<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Arts, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, 100083, China*

*a. zyuanfang2023@163.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the credibility of Ovid's statement in Pont.iv.13 where he claimed that he had written a poem in Getic tongue and performed it before the Getic audience. From the audience's perspective, this article reconsiders the statement because it was rarely considered by most scholars or was viewed as an imperial propaganda of Ovid. This article discusses Ovid's target audience and provides support by looking closely at the following perspectives: a. Performance, b. Language, and c. The content of this poem. Given primary sources such as inscriptions and several secondary sources, this paper concludes that Ovid's audience was the Tomitians, not the Getae. This paper also suggests a possible interpretation that through this exaggeration, Ovid demonstrated his lack of hope of return or a statement of his poetic immortality.

**Keywords:** Ovid, Pont.iv.13, Tomis, Getae, audience

### 1. Introduction

In the winter of 14-15CE, Ovid composed a letter addressed to Carus, namely the Pont.iv.13. In that poem, Ovid claimed that he had written a poem in Getic tongue to praise the imperial family and recited it among a group of Getae not long after he knew the deification of Augustus. Most scholars either take it as the truth or discuss whether Ovid wrote this poem as imperial propaganda and whether he took a role as a culture worker. However, little attention has been paid to discussing a more fundamental problem: whether this poem could be recognized as a poem created in "Getic language" to the "Getae" or not. Ovid's statement is suspicious either from the Getic language or the Getic audience. This paper thus aims to provide possible analyses and explanations regarding why the researcher considers Ovid has addressed the "wrong audience". It also provides an interpretation of why Ovid made such a mistake. Ovid did not write a poem in Getic tongue and performed it to a Getic audience; what he did is that he wrote in a specific Greek dialect and recited it to the Tomitians. It then also argues that Ovid has intentionally made such a mistake to reflect his loss of hope in returning to Rome and the anxiety of his poetic immortality, given that he can distinguish between the words "Getae" and "Tomitae".

Besides a close study of literary materials, this paper's argument will also be supported by the situation of Roman religion (especially the emperor worship) and some archaeological evidence such as inscriptions. These materials are applied to interpret Ovid's statement from the audience's perspective. Insights through this study may help to reevaluate Ovid's exaggerations of his exilic situation and his relationship with "the second prince" Tiberius.

## 2. Getae as Ovid's audience

### 2.1. a poem composed only for recitation

Quinn considers Ovid's performance in Pont.iv.13 as a recitation, using it as a fact to prove the popularity of recitation in the Augustan age. This part of the paper aims to introduce what a recitation is and analyze the hybrid language form of this poem, which makes it a recitation exclusively, as well as the importance of the content if it was disposable and the apparent discrepancy between the audience and the content. According to Ovid's Pont.iv.13, he alleged that he had composed a poem written in Getic tongue with Latin measures and held a public performance before a group of Getae, and the Getae favored him. Quinn categorizes the context of this performance as a recitation (*recitatio*), which means a public non-dramatic performance by the poet himself; the usual thing was for such performances to be given in the theatre [1].

Under such a definition, the researcher would like to point out that this poem's hybrid language form prevents it from any readers, which makes it a poem composed only for recitation, not for reading. Suppose the researcher assumes that the audience of Ovid was the Getae, a nomadic or semi-nomadic tribe that once inhabited the lower Danube region. In that case, documents or archaeological evidence can hardly prove the existence of a Getic word system. Nevertheless, their language may be described as a rough and broken sound by Tacitus (Germ.3.1). However, from Ovid's manifestation in Pont.iv.13, this poem is written because he said, "and the last page felt the touch of my fingers" (Pont.iv.13.35). So, the probable explanation is that he used Latin letters to write the Getic pronunciation. By doing so, this poem completely cuts off its readers. Neither the Romans nor the Getae can understand this hybrid form. And for this reason, this poem was composed only for recitation and was disposable.

If the researcher considers this poem disposable, the following factors become more than essential when analyzing Ovid's statement in Pont.iv.13: a. the poet's willingness to write a poem only for a recitation b. Its target audience, c. the content itself, and d. whether his audience was interested in the proposed content.

On the one hand, It doesn't seem kind for Ovid, a poet who attached high importance to the spread of his corpus and poetic immortality, to write a poem only for public performance. Also, because of his mistake "carmen et error", his oeuvre was expelled from almost every Roman public library (Tr.3.1/Pont.1.1.5-6), which intrigued his anxiety about the spread of his works.

On the other hand, neither the nature of Ovid nor the status of the poet's public performance would he reject this recitation. Ovid attached great importance to performance among his contemporaries. Also, the general performance of poems was famous during the Augustan period, and its status can be equal to reading or surpassing it to a certain degree [1]. Therefore, it would be possible that Ovid composed this poem only to acquire a direct audience, but he was cut off due to his relegation from Rome. Suppose Ovid can accept this disposable composition only for a recitation. In that case, this poem must be audience-oriented since the only usage of this poem is to acquire an audience willing to watch Ovid's performance.

Therefore, the content of this poem needs to arouse the Getic audience's interest to fulfill Ovid's ambition. Still, it is highly doubtful that the Getae who held different religions, would listen and hold favorable comments to this poem. Pont.iv.13 This specific letter can be dated to the winter of 14-15CE. From Ovid's description, this poem is about the deification of Augustus, the accession of Tiberius, and the imperial family. Augustus was deified a month after his death in August 14CE. Ovid composed this poem as soon as he knew the deification of Augustus. (Peter Green has calculated that it would take a courier a month (or less) to commute between Rome and Tomis [2]. If this poem is audience-oriented and disposable, then its target audience, the Getae, must be interested enough to

the theme of emperor worship and imperial propaganda. However, It is strange that those Getae with different religions would listen and comment favorably on this poem.

## 2.2. Access to a Getic audience

By assuming the reality that Ovid wrote in Getic and performed before the Getae, the researcher found the discrepancy between the audience and the poem's content. Then, the researcher may move to discuss whether Ovid had access to a Getic audience or not. From various evidences, the answer is highly damaging. This part of the paper explains why the researcher considers Ovid may have no access to a Getic audience, not only for the confinement of his relegation but also for a not mixed society of Tomis.

First of all, according to Gaertner, Ovid's relegation to Tomis will have required him to stay within a certain distance from the city [3], which limits his chances and means to access to a Getic audience who lived outside the Tomis city. Otherwise, he would violate the administrative law and leave himself in danger among those nomadic groups scattered on the Euxine steppe, depicted as raiders in other letters of Ovid's exilic poems.

Also, Tomis must be a Greek-Getic society to make Ovid's presentation of this recitation inside the city. Still, this paper would like to argue that Tomis was mainly a Greek city rather than a mixed society. Whether Tomis was a diverse society when Ovid lived there is under debate. Tomis is a Milesian colony on the Black Sea's left-hand, founded during the Greek colonization process in the late six century BCE [4]. R.M. Batty [5] and Christo Danov [6] argued that Tomis is a mixed society during Ovid's settlement. However, Batty's main statement is based on the belief that the situations of the lower Danube depicted in Ovid's exilic poems is mostly the truth. While Ovid revealed that he wrote some private letters in prose; therefore, some epistles in his exilic poems can be fictive [3]. Also, Ovid composed the exilic poems with countless hyperboles seeking a recall from the princes, making his statement unconvincing. Pippidi objects to the hypothesis that Tomis was a mixed society [7]. Although evidence shows that some nomadic groups in the region of the lower Danube sought shelter from Greek colonies along the western shore of the Black Sea [8], it does not demonstrate that Tomis sheltered a group of Getic people during the period when Ovid stayed there (9-17CE). Gaertner also suggests that Tomis' population was in Ovid's day predominantly Greek. Little epigraphical evidence of Romans or Thracians living in Tomis in the first centuries BC/AD [3]. The researcher thinks it is more likely that Tomis was mainly a Greek city in Ovid's time.

## 3. Hostility, Language, and Emperor Worship

This section aims to prove further that the real audience of Ovid's performance was the Tomitians not only because of the arguments above but also because of the hostile attitude demonstrated by an inscription from Istros, the language Tomitians spoke and the popularity of emperor worship among those Greek colonies on the western coast of the Black Sea.

### 3.1. An Inscription from Istros

Based on an inscription, it is possible that the Greek inhabitants of the Greek colonies along the Black Sea held a hostile attitude towards nomadic raiders on the steppe, supported by an inscription dated near the time of Ovid's settlement in Tomis. A memorandum dated 18 or 19CE [8] was found in Istros, a Greek colony not far from Tomis in the north. That inscription recorded the invasion of nomadic "barbarians". The inhabitants of Istros asked for military support from the Roman emperor Tiberius, or they would abandon their city and move elsewhere. Tiberius sent a Roman general to defeat nomadic raiders, and this inscription was set up to memorize this victory. Since this inscription was dated to 18-19CE, it still takes a long time from the start of the turbulent to the Istrians sending an

embassy to Rome and the victory. Therefore, this military campaign mentioned above may overlap Ovid's stay in Tomis. So, Ovid's account of the Getic raid can be valid, and it is not an exaggeration. Under nomadic attack, the Istrians even claimed to abandon their city if Rome would not send military force. The researcher can see the severe conflict between nomads (probably the Getae) and Istrians. Under such circumstances, the researcher may broadly suggest that Tomitians bore the same feelings as Istrians because of their Greek origins. As for the Roman attitude towards the Getae, Jones considers that it would have been a severe blow to Augustus' or Tiberius' prestige if they had allowed any of the Greek cities of the Euxine to fall again under the "barbarian" control [8]. The researcher may then conclude that both Greek citizens along the left-hand of the Black Sea and the Romans held hostile attitudes towards the Getae, which means Greek inhabitants considered themselves an insider of the Roman Empire and the Getae outsiders. Considering the Getae's and Greek inhabitants' hostility, Tomitians would probably not allow Getae to live with them.

### 3.2. Language

Besides Greek inhabitants' hostility towards the nomads, which would prove false the mixed society hypothesis, the Tomitians' language goes against Ovid's statement that he had written in the Getic tongue. In Ovid's description, the Getae said the Getic language. From the discussion above, Ovid probably had no access to the Getae living on the steppe outside Tomis because of his relegation. What's more, Tomis may not be a mixed society, which allows Ovid to find a group of Getic audience in the city. Suppose this poem was unable to be performed in front of the Getae. Would it ever be possible that this poem was written in Getic language if Tomitians had adopted a nomadic language through the long period of interactions between them and the nomads since the foundation of Tomis? It is doubtful that the Tomitians abandoned their language. Many scholars suggest that those Greek inhabitants still spoke Greek despite a dialect. Green speculates what Ovid learned was the bastardized Greek *lingua franca* [2]. Specifically, what Tomitians spoke can be the Attic-Ionic koine shared among Greek colonies along the left-hand of the Black Sea [9].

What's more, Ovid, despite a poet composing in Latin, once furthered his study in Athens (Tr.1.2.77-78). Also, his literary origin was highly related to Callimachus' composition besides the Roman predecessors. Therefore, he was familiar with Greek, and Gaertner even argued that there was no need for the poet to learn Getic, Scythian, Sarmatian, or Thracian [3]. Now, the researcher may conclude that Ovid's audience and the language Ovid used to compose are Greek. It would be more logical if the audience of Ovid's recitation were the Tomitians rather than the Getae, as Ovid professed. This statement can be further proved if the researcher considers this poem's content.

### 3.3. Emperor Worship

Lastly, even if Tomis was a mixed society during Ovid's settlement and the language of its inhabitants was enormously impacted by nomadic languages, the content of this poem will still prove that the audience was the Tomitians, not the Getae. Roman emperor worship originated from a Greek religion [10]. It is on the margins of the Roman world the Caesars began to be worshiped as gods in an early form of the emperor cult [11] because Augustus did not wish to be seen as an eastern tyrant or Italic king while he was still meant to maintain the facade that Rome is a republic [11]. However, his acceptance of the title "Augustus" suggests that he had already considered himself a god [11]. This Roman religion's Greek origin makes it easier to be accepted by Greek people. Evidence shows that Istros and Histria, both Greek cities near Tomis, built imperial cults when Augustus was still alive [8,12]. What's more, the inscription of Istros mentioned above mentions "divus Augustus" twice [8], which indicates the popularity of emperor worship in Greek cities. Also, at least a particular group of

Tomitians were well-educated because of the influence of Greek culture. They valued Ovid, the most famous living Roman poet, and spared him from tax. There is also evidence that Tomis had a theatre [4], which is a proper place for recitation.

Therefore, from the audience and content to the place, it is for the Tomitians, not the Getae, that Ovid held a poem performance, and the language he used to compose would be a particular dialect of Greek spoken by the Tomitians. If Ovid did not distinguish the word "Getae" from "Tomitae," it is still logical. However, it seems that Ovid knew precisely the difference between the two words. In Pont.iv.14, those two words appeared simultaneously in this poem.

Therefore, by deliberately misusing the word "Getae", this paper holds the standpoint of Ovid exaggerating or boasting his poem. However, the reason that he professed to compose a Getic poem does not receive enough discussion among the scholars.

## 4. Hypotheses

### 4.1. A demonstration for lack of hope

It is the letters not correctly filtered in the fourth volume of *Epistulae ex Ponto* that causes Ovid's quickly challenged discrepancy and what Ovid stated in Pont.iv.13 naturally demonstrates his lack of hope of return.

Wheeler-Goold elaborately discussed the organization and publication of Ovid's *Epistulae ex Ponto* [13]. There are four volumes of it, and the first three volumes were added, a proem and an epilogue by Ovid, which suggests his deliberate organization aimed for publication. However, the fourth volume lacks a proper proem and an epilogue, and addressees do not appear in the first three volumes. The addressee of Pont.iv.13 also does not appear in earlier letters. Ovid once wrote a letter to Cotys, the Thracian king, in Pont.2.9. Cotys was a "barbarian" king from the Roman perspective. Williams suggests that this reflects Ovid's loss of discretion and balance [14]; Cotys was a well-educated poet who even learned to write poems in Greek. However, what Ovid had professed in Pont.iv.13 is that he gave a recitation among the Getae, and there is no proof that they had already accepted or been willing to take a Roman value. It seems his loss of discretion became more evident than before, and also because the fourth volume may contain unfiltered letters, what Ovid suggested may be his true feelings.

From the discussion above, the researcher assumes that the performance Ovid depicted in Pont.iv.13 was held to commemorate the deification of Augustus among the Tomitians in a theatre of Tomis. Millar considers that Ovid, as a rejected royalist writing from the margin of the Roman empire, was trying to catch the distant echoes of political change. Also, it reflects the anxieties felt in Greek cities regarding how to react after the death of Augustus [15]. At the same time, the researcher supposes that Ovid almost wholly lost hope of return when he heard of the death of Augustus and the accession of Tiberius.

Knox attributes Ovid's relegation to the year 8CE when Tiberius came to power [16]. Knox noticed that one reason that caused Ovid's exile, namely the "carmen" *Ars Amatoria*, according to Ovid, was probably not for the frivolous content but for the political stance. *Ars* was published in 2 CE. If Augustus did not take it as an offense, then he would not take it as an offense in 8 CE. The plausible reason Knox points out is that Tiberius minded Ovid's praise of Gaius in *Ars*, the one who competed with him as a candidate for the throne. Ovid knew it deeply in his heart and never petitioned Tiberius for a recall; nevertheless, he addressed Germanicus for help. Ovid may have expected no mercy from Tiberius because he knew that the new prince was not as indulgent as Augustus regarding literature. Therefore, the researcher may suppose when Ovid knew Augustus' death and deification, he was very disappointed with the slighter chance of getting recalled or reprieved. That disappointment intrigued



him to compose a poem in the Greek dialect the Tomitians spoke and gave a recitation, a kind of performance prevalent in Rome then.

Moreover, by claiming that he composed in the Getic tongue and performed in front of the Getae, Ovid deliberately pushed himself out of the margin of the Roman empire. Only the anger of the Tomitians can force him to differentiate the word "Getae" from the term "Tomitae" because, for the most famous living poet in Rome, it makes no difference for him whether he lived in the city or out of the city. Ovid becomes a Getic poet because he can no longer be a Roman one [17].

## 4.2. Poetic immortality

Therefore, this paper interprets that Ovid found another way to secure his poetic immortality despite the slight possibility of return: to be a "Getic" poet. Ovid was always describing his deification through his corpus. In Ovid's sphragis of *Metamorphoses*, he claimed, "Wherever Rome's power extends over the conquered world, I shall have mention on men's lips" (Met.15.877-878). Wickkiser comments that this implies that Augustus' achievement does not limit Ovid. These comparisons between *princeps* and poets weigh in Ovid's favor [18]. And also, by talking about "domitis Romana" and "ore legar populi", Ovid closely connected his poetic immortality with the Roman public and political sphere. When Ovid knew he probably would never return to Rome, as the researcher mentioned above, he was utterly cut off from the Roman public and political sphere, which would severely impact his poetic immortality. Even if there was no way that Ovid could reacquire a usual Roman audience as he was still in Rome, he attempted to acquire a local audience. He reacted to Roman political change as soon as possible, which would be conducive to spreading his works. When Ovid wrote "et longum Getico murmur in ore fuit" (Pont.iv.13.36), it is also an alternative to "ore legar populi" (Met.15.878) for the one who would never be a Roman poet.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper analyses Ovid's statement of a public performance in Pont.iv.13 from the audience's perspective. The researcher may conclude that Ovid's audience was the Tomitians, not the Getae, by considering the form of the performance, the society of Tomis, and the content of this poem. Moreover, the researcher proposes two hypotheses to explain Ovid's deliberate misuse of the word "Getae": one is the lack of hope for return; the other is Ovid's consideration for his poetic immortality.

Given the length, this paper only considers one misuse of a word in Ovid's exilic epistles. More attention can be paid to distinguishing Ovid's mixed usage of "Getae" and "Tomitae". Also, Ovid's statement of being a Getic poet can be easily checked by the Romans, given the presence of Roman aristocrats serving as legates and in other high offices in Moesia Inferior and given the extent of ancient trade between Tomis and the rest of the Roman empire, Ovid's Roman audience will have had other, more reliable sources than the poet's account [3]. This context makes Ovid's statement full of uncertainty, and the researcher may also analyze Ovid's exaggerations through its reception by the Roman audience.

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