
INTRODUCTION

1 POLITICS AND POETRY

Aktion today is the site of an airport on the Adriatic coast of Greece, offering seasonal access from various European cities to the nearby holiday island of Lefkada. On 2 September 31 BC, just offshore, there took place a naval battle to which the ancient village of Actium gave its name. On the one side were Mark Antony and Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen; on the other was Octavian, the heir and adopted son of Julius Caesar. Octavian emerged the winner from a conflict which contemporaries saw in terms of global domination (Nep. *Att.* 20.5). Such an outcome demanded commemoration, and on the promontory opposite that of Actium Octavian founded a colony, to which he gave the name Nicopolis ('Victory City'), and set up an elaborate memorial on the site where he had had his camp. The remains are still visible today.¹

Although the matter is the subject of scholarly controversy, it is remarkable to think that the poet Horace was almost certainly a member of Octavian's entourage on that early September day more than two thousand years ago.² He owed his presence at the battle to his friendship with Gaius Maecenas, who was a member of Octavian's inner circle and may aptly be described as a 'minister' of the newly victorious leader.³ In his first collection of poems, Book 1 of the *Sermones* or 'Satires', published in 36/35 BC, the poet describes his first meeting with Maecenas two or three years earlier.⁴ His name had been mentioned to the great man by his friends and fellow poets Virgil and Varius,⁵ but, when he came into Maecenas' presence, overcome by the occasion, he was tongue-tied. Nevertheless, after nine months he was summoned back and 'ordered' to be counted among Maecenas' *amici* (S. 1.6.54–62). It was a dramatic change of fortune for a poet who, elsewhere in the same satire, says that people criticise him for being 'the son of a freedman'

¹ See W. M. Murray and P. Petsas, *Octavian's Campsite Memorial for the Actian War* (1989), K. L. Zachos, *An Archaeological Guide to Nicopolis: Rambling through the Historical, Sacred, and Civic Landscape* (2015).

² Du Quesnay, *TC* 19 and n. 17; so too Nisbet, *CCH* 11–12, in his discussion of Horace's life and chronology.

³ A recent study is C. Chillet, *De l'Étrurie à Rome: Mécène et la fondation de l'Empire* (2016); note also Lyne, *Hor.* 132–8.

⁴ The precise date is uncertain (see Muecke on S. 2.6.40–2).

⁵ For L. Varius Rufus see A. S. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry c. 60 BC–AD 20* (2007) 253–81.

(S. 1.6.6, 45–6). Class and status were of vital importance in the elitist society of ancient Rome.

It may be objected that it is naïve to read Horace's satires in a straightforwardly autobiographical manner, and it is undoubtedly true that in certain respects his self-presentation is modelled on such predecessors as Lucilius, the second-century inventor of the satirical genre and himself said by Horace to be an autobiographical poet (S. 2.1.30–4), and Bion, the Cynic sage, who flourished around 300 BC.⁶ But the fact remains that Horace's verse – and this goes for the *Odes* as well as the *Satires* – is an amalgam of literature and life and gives every impression of supplying readers with precious details which are not to be found in the *Vita Horati* which has come down to us under the name of Suetonius, the second-century AD biographer.⁷

Suetonius in his *Vita* tells us that Horace was born on 8 December 65 BC, when L. Aurelius Cotta and L. Manlius Torquatus were consuls:⁸ he was thus two years older than Octavian, the future emperor Augustus. In *Odes* 3 he himself mentions the year of his birth (3.21.1), and perhaps also alludes to the month and the day (3.28.1–2n.); his birthplace was Venusia (modern Venosa) on the border of Apulia in the south of Italy (cf. S. 2.1.34), an area he twice recalls with pride and affection in Book 3 (3.4.9–20, 30.10–12). He describes his beloved father as both a smallholder and a *coactor*, rendered in Gowers' commentary as 'an embryonic bank-manager' (S. 1.6.71, 86). From the jibe 'son of a freedman' scholars used to infer that the father was a former slave, but Gordon Williams argued that this was misleading.⁹ In the so-called Social War of 91–89 BC, which Horace in *Odes* 3 calls the 'Marsian War' (3.14.18), various allies (*socii*) of Rome rebelled, Venusia prominent amongst them. Williams suggested that, when Venusia at last succumbed to siege towards the end of the war, Horace's father was one of the three thousand taken prisoner and sold into slavery, regaining his freedom and citizenship only a few years afterwards. The jibe reported by Horace was true, but it was not the whole truth.

Shortly after Horace's fifth birthday there was formed the so-called 'First Triumvirate', an unofficial alliance of power between Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar and M. Licinius Crassus. Each of the three entered the alliance for what he could get out of it, and the belief that the alliance

⁶ For Bion see Moles, *CCH* 165–8. Even Horace's self-description as 'libertino patre natum' has a literary parentage (*PH* 112–15).

⁷ Suetonius' *Vita* is discussed by Fraenkel 1–23. On the general question see Tsitsiou-Chelidoni; also below, pp. 20–1.

⁸ See Bradshaw, *TC* 2–10. ⁹ Williams, *HH* 296–313.

made civil war ultimately inevitable ‘was the standard view in antiquity and still is today’.¹⁰ We do not know the point in Horace’s childhood when his father took him to Rome to be educated (*S.* 1.6.76–8, *Epi.* 2.2.41–2), but, since a boy might enter into the care of a *grammaticus* at the age of 11 or 12, Horace’s relocation to Rome was perhaps in 53 BC, the year when Crassus, who had led a campaign against the Parthians, was killed at Carrhae in one of the worst disasters in Roman military history. Revenge against the Parthians and recovery of the legionary standards which they had seized would reverberate in political life during the last days of the Roman Republic and well into the principate of Augustus, as various references in Book 3 of the *Odes* attest (see esp. 3.2). Meanwhile Julius Caesar, Crassus’ partner in the Triumvirate, was extending his reach from Gaul to the southern shores of Britain, an achievement mentioned by Catullus (11.10–12, 29.4, 20) shortly before the poet’s presumed death in 54; Lucretius died at about the same time, but Cicero would continue speaking and writing for another decade until his murder in December 43.

Crassus’ death left Caesar and Pompey as rivals, neither of them able to tolerate the power of the other, and civil war broke out when Caesar, in pursuit of Pompey, transferred his army from Cisalpine Gaul to Italy across the River Rubicon in 49 BC. Pompey fled to Greece but was defeated at Pharsalus in Thessaly on 9 August the following year. After an interval during which he eliminated Pompeian resistance in Africa and Spain but was unable to prevent the escape of Sex. Pompeius, Pompey’s youngest son, Caesar returned to Rome but seemed to be nurturing monarchical ambitions: in 44 BC, now *dictator perpetuus* as well as consul, he was killed on 15 March in a plot led by M. Junius Brutus and C. Cassius Longinus. Caesar’s will revealed that he had adopted Octavian, his nineteen-year-old grand-nephew, as his son and named him as his heir.

Whether Horace was still in Rome at the time of Caesar’s murder is unknown, but a late-republican or Augustan inscription has been found at Montemilone, about 11 miles from Venusia, marking the burial place of one Cinura, slave of a Lucius Salvius.¹¹ Her name is a transliteration of the Greek κινύρα, which in turn renders the Phoenician word for ‘lyre’. Now Horace in his later works looks back repeatedly on an early girlfriend who evidently died young and whose name is printed by modern editors as ‘Cinara’ (κινύρα means ‘artichoke’).¹² But the manuscripts of Horace

¹⁰ A. W. Lintott, *CQ* 21 (1971) 498. The First Triumvirate was formed in 60 BC or (see *PH* 133–7) early 59.

¹¹ *L’Année Epigraphique* 1994, No. 472: ‘Cinura | L. Salui h(ic) | sita est. | Silo L. Sal(ui) | posuit’.

¹² *C.* 4.1.3–4, 4.13.21–2, *Epi.* 1.7.28, 1.14.33.

transmit the middle vowel of her name in numerous different ways, including –y– ('Cinyra'), prompting the tantalising suggestion – made by J. D. Morgan – that the slave recorded on the inscription and the girl remembered by Horace are one and the same.¹³ If that is so, then Horace was back in Venusia at some point in the mid-40s.

Popular hostility to Caesar's death made natural allies of Octavian and Mark Antony, Caesar's colleague in the consulship. Brutus and Cassius were compelled to leave Rome, and in the autumn of 44 Brutus is found in Athens, recruiting young Roman students for his army (Plut. *Brut.* 24.2); Suetonius tells us that amongst the recruits was Horace, who had gone to Athens to study philosophy at the famous Academy (*Epi.* 2.2.43–5): since this was a normal stage in a young Roman's higher education,¹⁴ it should not be inferred that the experience necessarily denotes any special propensity for philosophy, although some scholars believe that Horace's poetry is seriously philosophical.¹⁵ Two years later the future poet was serving as one of the officers (*tribuni militum*, of whom there were six in a legion) in Brutus' and Cassius' army when it was confronted by the forces of Antony and Octavian at the battle of Philippi in Thrace (cf. *S.* 1.6.48, *Epi.* 2.2.49): no other engagement was bloodier for its slaughter of distinguished men, says the historian Velleius (71.2). Brutus and Cassius were defeated; Horace, as he famously puts it in the *Odes*, left his shield behind on the battlefield (2.7.9–12; cf. 3.4.26). Subsequently, as a member of the losing side, he, like Alcaeus centuries earlier (130B.5–9), was deprived of the farm which he had inherited from his father, and he was compelled by *paupertas* to write poetry (*Epi.* 2.2.50–2; cf. *S.* 1.6.71); Horace's eviction was only one of many, as the victors sought to settle their veterans on the land, and the misery of the age is eloquently voiced in the *Eclogues* of Virgil (1, 9), whose poetic career had started a little earlier than that of his friend.

The relationship between Antony and Octavian had been formalised in 43, when, along with M. Aemilius Lepidus, they had been appointed to the so-called 'Second Triumvirate'. Their combined efforts eventually saw the defeat of the troublesome Sex. Pompeius in 36 BC, but Lepidus was always the least important member of the alliance and in the latter years

¹³ 'The name of Horace's first mistress', Archaeological Institute of America, 113th Annual Meeting Abstracts (Philadelphia, January 2012), pp. 145–6. I am most grateful to Professor Morgan for allowing me to refer to his suggestion in advance of its formal publication.

¹⁴ Ll. W. Daly, 'Roman study abroad', *AJP* 71 (1950) 40–58.

¹⁵ The matter is highly controversial; good bibliographical summary in Moles, *CCH* 180.

of the decade the struggle for power essentially rested between Octavian and Antony, culminating in the battle of Actium in 31. It was during the 30s that, as Suetonius reports, Horace successfully sought pardon for his past association with Brutus and procured the position of *scriba quaestorius* (administrative assistant to the quaestors who were in charge of the public finances: cf. *S.* 2.6.36–7).¹⁶ It is unclear whether his new position provided him with sufficient income to write poetry or whether his early poetry elicited subsidies from wealthy patrons which enabled him to buy his position as *scriba*,¹⁷ either way, as we have already seen, early in the decade he came to the attention of Maecenas, whose patronage guaranteed him financial security for the rest of his life. To Maecenas was dedicated the first book of the *Sermones*, whose socio-political concerns exactly reflect those of the Octavianic coterie to which Horace now belonged.¹⁸ A second book of *Sermones*, comprising eight poems, was published in perhaps 30, and, though not dedicated to Maecenas, features the patron prominently.

Also published around 30 were the *Epodes*, a heterogeneous collection of seventeen poems which in many ways foreshadow the *Odes*. Two of them express anguish and despair at the ongoing civil war (7, 16); two of them are centred on the battle of Actium, one being set before the battle (1), the other a celebration of the victory (9). Both Actium poems are addressed to Maecenas and serve to dedicate the book to him: since in the first of them Horace expresses gratitude for his patron's generosity (1.31–2), many readers have believed that the poet is referring to the Sabine farm, to which he alludes, or seems to allude, frequently in his verse (e.g. 3.1.47–8):¹⁹ in fact Horace never says explicitly that he ever received the farm as a gift, nor is there any independent evidence to this effect, but the probability is deemed to be very high.²⁰

Victorious from his defeat of Antony and Cleopatra and the subsequent military operations, Octavian returned to Rome in mid-August 29 BC and celebrated a series of triumphs. Eighteen months later, on 16 January 27 BC, he was given the name 'Augustus' – used twice in Book 3 (3.3.11, 5.3) – on the occasion of the first so-called 'constitutional settlement', whereby 'rem publicam ex mea potestate in senatus populique

¹⁶ For 'Horace in the Thirties' see J. Griffin in Rudd (1993) 1–22.

¹⁷ See *PH* 112–13. ¹⁸ Du Quesnay (1984).

¹⁹ The 'farm' or 'villa' is traditionally sited in the valley of the Digentia (mod. Licenza), about 30 miles ENE of Rome (*BA* Map 44: C1): see Frischer, *CH* 75–90 (map on p. 77).

²⁰ Cairns, *RL* 241–3, in response to A. Bradshaw, 'Horace in *Sabinis*', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* (1989) 5.160–86, who points to other possibilities, such as personal purchase by Horace.

Romani arbitrium transtuli' (*RG* 34.1).²¹ He then left Rome for Gaul and Spain, where in 26–25 BC he campaigned against the Cantabrians and Astures in the NW of the country; there are repeated allusions to this campaign in Book 3. In 24 he returned to the capital, a moment marked by Horace in 3.14.

It is generally, but not universally, accepted that Books 1–3 of the *Odes* were published in the second half of 23 BC, that being the date of the sunset consulship of L. Sestius, whose address amidst a series of luminaries at the start of Book 1 (1.1 Maecenas, 1.2 Octavian, 1.3 Virgil, 1.4 Sestius, 1.6 Agrippa, 1.7 Plancus) is regarded as otherwise inexplicable.²² If the date is correct, publication coincided with the second and last of the constitutional settlements by which Augustus formalised and consolidated his position of power.²³ Three or so years later Horace dedicated to Maecenas his first collection of verse letters, in which the poet reveals his disappointment with the contemporary reaction to his lyric poetry (*Epi.* 1.19.35–6). An exception, however, was the *princeps* himself, to whom Horace had sent a special copy (cf. *Epi.* 1.13): according to Suetonius in his Life of Horace, Augustus so approved of the *Odes* and believed in their immortality that he enjoined on the poet the composition of the *Carmen Saeculare*. This was the hymn which was sung by a choir of boys and girls on the last day of the Ludi Saeculares or Secular Games, which, as we know from the long inscription of the events which has survived (*CIL* 6.32323 = *ILS* 5050), were celebrated on three successive days and nights (31 May–2 June) in 17 BC to mark the start of a new era.²⁴ Line 149 of the inscription exhibits one of the most evocative of all Latin epigraphic sentences to have survived from the ancient world: 'CARMEN COMPOSUIT Q. HORATIVS FLACCVS'. Apart from Augustus and other direct participants, Horace is the only person whose name appears on the inscription, and its position directly above those of Augustus and Agrippa in the following

²¹ On this see Cooley ad loc., and, for Octavian in the years 30–27, R. Kearsley, *CQ* 59 (2009) 147–66. Augustus and his principate have been the subject of much recent scholarship, e.g. P. J. Goodman, 'Twelve Augusti', *JRS* 108 (2018) 156–70, A. E. Cooley, 'From the Augustan Principate to the invention of the Age of Augustus', *JRS* 109 (2019) 71–87, T. P. Wiseman, *The House of Augustus* (2019).

²² See Lyne, *Hor.* 73–5. O. Murray (in Rudd (1993) 103) favoured 24 BC, though he never published his reasons. Hutchinson (2008) disputes the relevance of Sestius and argues that each book was first published separately, suggesting e.g. 26 for Book 1, early 24 for Book 2, and early 23 for Book 3 (138–9, 147).

²³ For a summary see e.g. Rich on Dio 53.32.5.

²⁴ For the relevant lines of the inscription see Thomas' commentary on the *Carmen Saeculare*, pp. 274–6 (translation in M. G. L. Cooley (ed.), *The Age of Augustus* (LACTOR 17, 2003) 275).

line²⁵ would have been appreciated by a poet who took such evident pride in his name.²⁶ But there is a further refinement if the poet's name is spelled out in full, something precluded by the naming conventions of the inscription:

Cārmēn cōmpōsūit ´ Quīntūs Hōrātīūs | Flaccus.

The inscribed sentence incorporates an Asclepiad line, the 'signature' metre of *Odes* 1–3, which are framed by Horace's only two poems in stichic Asclepiads.²⁷ In identifying the author of the *Carmen Saeculare*, the sentence also acknowledges the collection of poems which won him the commission.²⁸ This refinement too would have been appreciated by a poet who himself enjoyed transferring metres from one context to another.²⁹

Four years later, and a decade after the publication of Books 1–3, Horace published his fourth and final book of odes, in which at least a third of the poems deal with the poet and the power of poetry (4.2, 3, 6, 8, 9): now Horace is pointed out by passers-by as a virtuoso of the Roman lyre (4.3.22–3 'monstror digito praetereuntium | Romanae fidicen lyrae'). The fifteen odes of Book 4 were followed by the Letter to Augustus (*Epi.* 2.1), the Letter to Florus (*Epi.* 2.2) and the Letter to the Pisones (the *Ars Poetica*), which together constitute a second collection of verse letters and seem to have been published at some point later than 12 BC.³⁰ Whether or not Maecenas in his later years had lost favour with Augustus,³¹ the fact that neither of these collections is dedicated to Horace's patron has led to speculation that there was a cooling in relations with the poet. Yet 'Maecenas meus' is the description he is given in *Odes* 4 (4.1.1.19) and, when he died

²⁵ For this see J. Nelis-Clément and D. Nelis, 'Furor epigraphicus: Augustus, the poets, and the inscriptions', in P. Liddel and P. Low (edd.), *Inscriptions and their Uses in Greek and Latin Literature* (2013), 317–47, at 322–3.

²⁶ He mentions his *praenomen* once in his work (*S.* 2.6.37), his *nomen* and *cognomen* twice each (4.6.44, *Epi.* 1.14.5; *S.* 2.1.18, *Epo.* 15.12), but this is not the limit of it. When at *S.* 1.9.20 he says 'I lowered my little ears like a bad-tempered donkey' ('demitto aurículas ut iniquae mentis asellus'), we are certainly intended to remember that *flaccus* means 'floppy-eared'; and scholars have detected numerous puns involving the noun *hora* – appropriately for a poet so preoccupied with the concept of time (see K. J. Reckford, 'Horatius: the man and the hour', *AJP* 114 (1997) 583–612).

²⁷ The metre recurs in the troublesome 4.8.

²⁸ See A. J. Woodman, 'Numerous Horatius?', *CQ* 69 (2019) 911–12. Compare Sall. *C.* 19.5 'Cn. Pompeii ueteres fidosque clientis', which becomes a hexameter line when *Gnaei* is spelled out in full.

²⁹ See Fraenkel 349 on the incorporations of Terence at *S.* 2.3.264 and *Epi.* 1.19.41; see also 3.3.70–2n.

³⁰ For the dating (controversial) see S. J. Harrison, *PLLS* 13 (2008) 173–86.

³¹ See Tac. *A.* 3.30.4 and W–M ad loc.

in 8 BC, Maecenas' last words to Augustus, perhaps in his will, were 'Horati Flacci ut mei memor esto': this instruction was adduced by Suetonius as evidence of Maecenas' strong affection, adding that Horace held an important place in the friendship of both him and Augustus. This is certainly the impression we derive from the poetry, and modern attempts to suggest otherwise – that Horace is somehow subversive and that his praise of such great men is not to be taken at face value – are based on a mistaken view of Roman social conventions and the reciprocity expected between friends.³² To him it was a virtue that he had pleased the leaders of Rome in war and peace (*Epi.* 1.20.23 'me primis urbis belli placuisse domique').

According to Suetonius, the poet himself died on 27 November 8 BC, thus fulfilling the prediction in Book 2 of the *Odes* that he and Maecenas would die together (2.17);³³ they were buried side by side on the Esquiline Hill. Few poets have had as great an influence on the literature of Western Europe.³⁴

Chronological Table

BC	HISTORICAL EVENTS	AUTHORS AND WORKS	
91–89	Social War between Rome and her Italian allies (<i>socii</i>)		
		Catullus born (?)	84
81	Sulla dictator	Cicero's first speech	81
		Philodemus in Rome (?)	75
		Parthenius in Rome	72
		Virgil born (15 October)	70
		Horace born (8 December)	65
63	Cicero consul; Octavian born (23 September)		

³² An enormous amount has been written on patronage at Rome: a standard account is P. White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (1993); for Horace and Maecenas in particular see e.g. Du Quesnay (1984) and *TC* 17–37.

³³ For the date of Horace's death see Bradshaw, *TC* 11–16.

³⁴ The influence of Horace is much too large a subject for even a cursory summary here; for a brief survey see S. Harrison, *Horace* (2014) 84–94; also *EO* Vol. 3. See too below, p. 26 n. 87.

bc	HISTORICAL EVENTS	AUTHORS AND WORKS	
60	'First Triumvirate'		
59	Julius Caesar consul	Livy born (?)	59
58–50	Caesar in Gaul		
55	Caesar invades Britain		
54	Caesar invades Britain again	Catullus and Lucretius die (?)	54
53	Battle of Carrhae (May): Parthians kill Crassus, capture standards		
49	Julius Caesar crosses Rubicon (January): civil war		
48	Battle of Pharsalus (9 August): Caesar defeats Pompey, who is subsequently killed		
44	Caesar killed (15 March): Octavian adopted as his heir		
43	Second Triumvirate; Octavian cos. I	Ovid born (20 March); Cicero murdered (7 December)	43
42	Battle of Philippi (23 October): Brutus and Cassius defeated; Horace escapes	Sallust starts writing (?)	42
		Virgil's <i>Eclogues</i> published (?)	39
		Horace is now Maecenas' <i>amicus</i> (?)	37

BC	HISTORICAL EVENTS	AUTHORS AND WORKS	
36	Battle of Naulochus (3 Sept.): Sex. Pompeius defeated	Horace, <i>Satires</i> 1 published (?)	36
34	Octavian cos. II	Livy starts writing (?)	34
31	Octavian cos. III; Battle of Actium (2 Sept.): Antony and Cleopatra defeated		
30–23	Octavian/Augustus cos. IV–XI	Horace, <i>Satires</i> 2 and <i>Epodes</i> published (?)	30
29	Octavian's triple triumph (13–15 August): civil war formally ended; Temple of deified Julius Caesar dedicated (18 August)	Virgil's <i>Georgics</i> published (?)	29
28	Temple of Palatine Apollo dedicated (9 October)	Propertius' Book 1 published (?)	28
27	Octavian named 'Augustus' (16 January); 'first constitutional settlement'; Augustus departs for Gaul and then Spain	Tibullus' Book 1 published (?)	27
26	Augustus campaigning in Spain; Aelius Gallus invades Arabia	Cornelius Gallus kills himself	26
25	Augustus taken ill, receives Indian embassy; Temple of Janus closed		
24	Augustus returns to Rome	Book 2 of Propertius published	24
23	'Second constitutional settlement': Aug. resigns consulship, receives <i>imperium maius</i> ; Marcellus, his nephew, dies (September)	HORACE PUBLISHES ODES 1–3	23