

THE DATE OF HORACE'S FIRST EPODE

THE first Epode provides no clear indication of date. We learn only that Maecenas is about to join Octavian on a dangerous expedition and has suggested that Horace should not accompany him, while Horace retorts that he will be unable to enjoy himself in the absence of his patron and would be ready to follow him to the ends of the earth, whatever the danger, in the hope of earning his gratitude.

The Epodes were published about 30 B.C. and, perhaps for that reason, the scholiast Pseudo-Acron confidently assigns the poem to the period immediately before the battle of Actium with the comment: 'Maecenatem prosequitur euntem ad bellum navale cum Augusto adversum Antonium et Cleopatram.' It is curious that in referring to the activities of Octavian in 31 the author uses the title Augustus, which was not conferred on him before 27,¹ but the substance of his comment accords with the known facts. In the spring of 31 Octavian asked all Romans of influence to meet him at Brundisium,² thereby to demonstrate their willingness to take part in the war against Antony and Cleopatra, and more than seven hundred senators are known to have offered their services.³ Quite probably Maecenas set an example of loyalty by escorting him at least in the initial stages of the campaign, even if he realized at the time that he would soon have to return to take charge of affairs at Rome, and if he went, Horace, who had already travelled with him on missions of importance, such as that forming the subject of *Satires* 1. 5,⁴ would not gladly be left behind. Yet this view is no more than a probability and while, as Wistrand has shown,⁵ there is no evidence that Maecenas did not go to Actium, equally there is no way of establishing that he did. The Pseudo-Acronian scholia are themselves of doubtful authenticity and are considered by Keller⁶ to date only from the fifth century A.D., and the only earlier authority offers difficulties of a similar kind. That is the eulogistic poem known as the *Elegia Prima in Maecenatem*, in which the following verses appear (45-8):

cum freta Niliacae texerunt lata carinae,
fortis erat circa, fortis et ante ducem,
militis Eoi fugientia terga secutus,
territus ad Nili dum ruit ille caput.

Here we have an explicit statement that Maecenas took part in the battle itself, and elsewhere (v. 10) the unknown poet claims that he is writing at the request of Lollius soon after his hero's death, which occurred in 8 B.C.; if this were true, a mistake about an important event in his career would be very unlikely.

¹ Scholiasts elsewhere use the title Augustus on inappropriate occasions (Porphyrio, for example, on *Odes* 1. 37), but suspicions are nevertheless aroused.

² Dio 50. 11. 5.

³ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 25.

⁴ For the date of the Satire see below.

⁵ E. Wistrand, *Horace's Ninth Epode and its Historical Background* (1958), 6-19. Wistrand (p. 34) feels 'fairly sure' that Horace ad-

ressed the ninth Epode to Maecenas in the theatre of war just before the battle of Actium but is unable to counter all the arguments advanced by E. Fraenkel in *Horace* (1957), 71-5. For a more recent discussion of the poem see G. Williams in *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (1968), 212 ff.

⁶ O. Keller, *Symbola Philologorum Bonnen-sium* (1867).

However, the language of the *Elegia* corresponds closely with certain passages of Seneca and appears to be a deliberate attempt to mitigate or deny his criticisms of Maecenas in *Epistulae Morales* 114.¹ For example, in 114. 6 Seneca attacks Maecenas' mode of dress in these words: 'non statim cum haec legeris hoc tibi occurret, hunc esse qui solutis tunicis in urbe semper incesserit (nam etiam cum absentis Caesaris partibus fungeretur, signum a discincto petebatur).' The elegist refers to the charge that he was *discinctus* in v. 21:

quod discinctus eras, animo quoque, carpitur unum.

Then, four verses later, he speaks of his *tunicae solutae*:

livide, quid tandem tunicae nocuere solutae?

The same garb is mentioned in v. 59 as one favoured by the god Bacchus:

et tibi securo tunicae fluxere solutae.

Such echoes are too numerous to be coincidental and, since there are also points of similarity to the works of Martial and Statius,² it seems best to regard the poem as a scholastic exercise of the Flavian period; in any case, it must have been composed long after the death of Maecenas. A panegyrist is by nature prone to exaggeration and, when his subject is a statesman who enjoyed great prominence at a time when his city was engaged in one of the greatest battles ever fought, he can perhaps be forgiven for assigning him a part in that battle without thoroughly checking his sources. Certainly, when, as here, the author is writing many years after the event, we must consider his testimony highly suspect. The conclusion, therefore, is that it is impossible to substantiate the comment of Pseudo-Acron.

To counteract this, it may be argued that Maecenas intended to go to Actium but was put in charge of Rome and Italy just before Octavian's departure and so never set sail.³ One then has to assume that Horace composed the Epode before the change of plan and later decided to open his collection with it merely because it contained an appropriate declaration of loyalty to his patron. But this is most unsatisfactory. Horace was a master of discretion and *urbanitas*, and it is hard to believe that he of all men would be content to place in the most prominent position a poem written in anticipation of an important and dangerous voyage which was never in fact made. Maecenas' effeminate appearance and luxurious way of life already provided his detractors with ample ammunition and this would clearly make him even more a butt for ridicule.

In view of these doubts it is surprising that modern editors have generally accepted the dating of the Epode to 31 B.C. without appearing to consider the theory advanced by Thomas Dyer in an article on Horatian chronology in

¹ See R. B. Steele, *The Nux, Maecenas and Consolatio ad Liviam* (1933), 33-5. F. Skutsch in Pauly-Wissowa (iv. 945-6) objects that if the poet had known of Seneca's charges he would have dealt with his remarks in the same *epistula* about Maecenas' *comitatus* and *uxor*. But note Steele's comments in op. cit. 34.

² See Steele, op. cit. 35-8, and B. Axelsson, 'De Aetate Consolationis ad Liviam et Elegiarum in Maecenatem', *Eranos*, xxviii (1930), 1 ff.

³ This view, advanced by Mitscherlich (1800), is accepted by L. Hermann (*Horace Épodes* [1953]) and other modern scholars.

Classical Museum, ii (1845), 187 ff.¹ Dyer rejects the view of Bentley² and Tate³ that Horace wrote and published his works consecutively and, while arguing against their assignment of all the Epodes to 32 and 31, suggests that the first Epode refers not to the Actian campaign but to the war against Sextus Pompeius in 36.⁴ Some of his opinions are too strongly expressed, as, for example, when he says that it is 'clear and indisputable' that Maecenas was not present at Actium, but the main points of his view deserve elaboration.

Firstly, there is no doubt that Maecenas accompanied Octavian in the final operations against Sextus. Octavian sailed from Puteoli on 1 July 36,⁵ but two days later encountered a storm off the coast of Lucania and took refuge in the bay of Velia.⁶ Appian⁷ relates that, as repairs were not likely to be complete for thirty days, Maecenas was sent to Rome to reassure the people, who were suffering from lack of provisions and were apprehensive at such a turn of events. He subsequently returned but after the serious defeat near Tauro-menium was dispatched again in mid August to restore order at Rome and punish some revolutionists.⁸ Appian is not the most competent of historians, but there is no reason to suspect his testimony here.

Secondly, in their accounts of the storm of 3 July, both Dio and Velleius Paterculus⁹ name Palinurus, the promontory south of the bay of Velia, as the place where most of the ships were destroyed. This brings to mind the fourth Ode of Book 3 where, in an address to the Muses, Horace mentions a lucky escape at Palinurus (vv. 25-8):¹⁰

vestris amicum fontibus et choris
non me Philippis versa acies retro,
devota non exstinxit arbos,
nec Sicula Palinurus unda.

The scholiast Porphyrio makes the unhelpful comment: 'ostendit se etiam in mari circa Palinurum promunturium periclitatum.' Pseudo-Acron has more to say: 'promunturium est Siciliae, non a Palinuro Aeneae gubernatore dictum, sed [ab] Annibalis, ubi redeuntem se Horatius de Macedonia periclitatum dixit, qui est et navibus periculosus locus.' As we have seen, the Pseudo-Acronian scholia are not of great antiquity and, since there is no other reference in extant literature to a Sicilian promontory of that name, there is little doubt that the author is making a guess in an attempt to justify *Sicula . . . unda*. Curiously enough, the only exact parallel of this phrase in Horace occurs in a passage about Hannibal, in the same part of an Alcaic stanza.¹¹ This is *Odes* 4. 4. 42-4:

¹ E. C. Wickham (1874) is an exception. He acknowledges Dyer's interpretation but offers no personal opinion.

² In the preface of his edition (1711).

³ J. Tate, *Horatius Restitutus* (1837), 91.

⁴ Note also Dyer's entry on Maecenas in Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*.

⁵ Appian, *BC* 5. 97. 404. Dio (49. 1. 1) names his starting-point as Baiae (Puteoli is on the Sinus Baianus) and says that he set out in the spring, but Appian's statement that everyone knew of his intention to sail on the tenth day after the summer solstice and his theory that 1 July was chosen because that

month was named after Julius Caesar, the ever-successful conqueror, are more definite and convincing.

⁶ Appian, *BC* 5. 98. 408-10; Dio 49. 1. 3; Vell. Pat. 2. 79. 3-4. Note also Suet. *Aug.* 16. 1.

⁷ Appian, *BC* 5. 99. 412-14.

⁸ Appian, *BC* 5. 112. 470.

⁹ For references see n. 6.

¹⁰ Note Wistrand's views on this stanza (op. cit. 16-17).

¹¹ I am indebted to Professor F. W. Clayton for drawing my attention to this passage and its implications and for making valuable comments on other aspects of the problem.

dirus per urbis Afer ut Italas
 ceu flamma per taedas vel Eurus
 per Siculas equitavit undas.

Horace is comparing Hannibal riding through Italian cities with a flame sweeping through pine-trees or the east wind through Sicilian waves, but an unthinking scholiast may have taken both *per urbis* . . . *Italas* and *per Siculas* . . . *undas* with *Afer* and, noting the echo of the earlier Ode, have concluded that there was a second Palinurus, somehow connected with Hannibal. At any rate, it is difficult to see by what other means Pseudo-Acron could have introduced Hannibal in this context. But the need for conjecture vanishes when we consider that Maecenas definitely endured the storm off the known Palinurus in 36 and that Horace, his constant companion who later longed for an end to the travelling his service involved,¹ was almost certainly with him at the time. The Romans usually described the sea to the east of Sicily as *Siculus*, but that Horace uses the adjective more loosely is clear from the first stanza of *Odes* 2. 12, where again he mentions Hannibal:

Nolis longa ferae bella Numantiae
 nec durum Hannibalem nec Siculum mare
 Poeno purpureum sanguine mollibus
 aptari citharae modis.

The naval battles to which he alludes were those off Mylae, on the north coast, in 260 and off the Aegates Insulae, to the north-west of Sicily itself, in 242. He may therefore have felt free to call by this name all the Tuscan Sea lying north of the island, thereby including the waters that washed the Lucanian coast at Palinurus. But if this be thought questionable, nothing could be more appropriate than that Horace should imagine the hostile winds and waves as blowing from the very territory of the enemy, especially since the storm had burst upon the fleet at the height of summer, at the time when Sextus was parading himself as the son of Neptune.² Furthermore, whichever opinion one holds on the location of Horace's Palinurus, it is hard to see how he could nearly have met his doom off either the Lucanian or the Sicilian coast *en route* from Macedonia, as Pseudo-Acron says. He was obsessed with the perils of the sea³ and would scarcely have sailed through the Sicilian Straits, the legendary home of Scylla and Charybdis, and up the western coast of Italy in the winter of 42, the only occasion on which he is known to have made the voyage, when he could make the normal direct crossing to Brundisium.

We must now examine the opening verses of the poem:

Ibis Liburnis inter alta navium,
 amice, propugnacula,
 paratus omne Caesaris periculum
 subire, Maecenas, tuo.

The light galleys, called *Liburnae* after the Illyrian tribe which invented them,⁴ played a prominent part in the manœuvres of Octavian at Actium,⁵ although

¹ sit modus lasso maris et viarum
 militiaeque! (*Odes* 2. 6. 7-8)

² Appian *BC* 5. 100. 416-17. Cf. Dio 48. 19. 2, 48. 48. 5.

³ Note in particular *Odes* 1. 3. 9 ff.

⁴ Appian, *De Rebus Illyricis* 3.

⁵ Veget. 4. 33; Plut. *Ant.* 67. 2. Cf. Hor. *Odes* 1. 37. 30.

the ancient writers possibly exaggerate their importance because he himself employed one.¹ But this was no innovation, as Appian tells us that Liburnians were used in the Sicilian expedition. A considerable number was lost in the storm of 3 July 36,² while in the subsequent action near Tauromenium Octavian exhorted his fleet on board one³ and later dispatched one to Cornificius, the commander of the infantry.⁴ Indeed, Caesar⁵ and Lucan⁶ mention the use of such vessels by the Romans as early as 49 B.C. Similarly, the phrase *alta navium . . . propugnacula* can hardly be said to confirm the later date of composition. It is often assumed⁷ that Horace refers here to Antony's ships at Actium, which were larger than those of his opponent.⁸ But the poem contains nothing to corroborate this and it is surely much more likely that Horace visualizes his patron cruising in a Liburnian among the high ships of Octavian's fleet; the words *ibis . . . inter* seem inappropriate to an attack. After all Octavian himself is known to have adopted that course in 36 and in 31. It may lessen the force of the next couplet, as Doering believes,⁹ but Horace was too honest to suggest that Maecenas would figure prominently in the actual fighting. Dyer overstates his case for the earlier date with the claim that 'Caesar's ships at Actium were not high built'. The ships that won the day against Sextus were exceptionally high and stout and equipped with towers (*propugnacula*),¹⁰ and that the same ships were used in the Actian campaign is clear from Dio 50. 19. 3, where, in his address to his troops before the battle, Antony describes those of his adversary as τὰ αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ὄντα καὶ μήτε πλείω μήτ' ἀμείνω γεγονότα. Octavian may have used more Liburnians in 31, but the bulk of his fleet consisted of vessels which, though smaller than those of Antony, were large by normal standards. Yet the suggested interpretation of *alta navium . . . propugnacula* perhaps makes *alta* seem a little weak, if we date the Epode to 31 and the contrast is merely between the fighting ships and the Liburnians. But such an objection would not be valid if the date were 36. Horace would then be drawing attention to the fact that the fighting ships were higher not only than the Liburnians but also, as would be more relevant in a poem of this kind, than the ships of the enemy.

He concludes the poem with the following verses (31-4):

satis superque me benignitas tua
ditavit: haud paravero,
quod aut avarus ut Chremes terra premam,
discinctus aut perdam nepos.

These are said, even by Dyer,¹¹ to establish that Maecenas had already presented Horace with the Sabine farm. The theory is most attractive, but unfortunately it cannot be substantiated. It is equally probable that the poet here refers purely to the intense pleasure and satisfaction which he has derived from his friendship with so distinguished a patron. Indeed, he would perhaps be

¹ ἐπιδὼν δὲ τὴν ἄλλην παράταξιν ἐν πλοίοις πρὸς τὸ δεξιὸν κομισθεὶς ἐθαύμασεν ἀτρεμοῦντας ἐν τοῖς στενοῖς τοὺς πολεμίους (Plut. *Ant.* 65. 6). Velleius Paterculus (2. 85. 2) says that Agrippa had complete charge of the operations, while Octavian sailed wherever he could be of service.

² Appian, *BC* 5. 99. 411.

³ *Ibid.* 5. 111. 463.

⁴ *Ibid.* 5. 112. 468.

⁵ Caesar, *BC* 3. 5. 3, 3. 9. 1.

⁶ Lucan 3. 534.

⁷ Wickham, for instance, makes this assumption 'if the scene is Actium'.

⁸ Dio 50. 18. 5-6, 23. 2-3, 32. 2; Florus 2. 21. 5-6; Oros. 6. 19. 9.

⁹ See his remarks on this phrase in his commentary (1826).

¹⁰ Dio 49. 1. 2, 3. 2; Appian *BC* 5. 106. 438.

¹¹ T. Dyer, loc. cit. 210.

guilty of bad taste, were he to imply that *superni villa candens Tusculi* (v. 29) would be superior to his new dwelling.¹ But even if it were an indisputable reference to the Sabine farm, it would not, as D'Alton maintains,² invalidate the claim to an earlier date for the Epode. The year in which Horace received his farm cannot be determined with certainty, but must have been after the publication of the first book of Satires; it is inconceivable that he would have failed to mention his most prized possession in his first published work if he had already acquired it. Our means of dating the book are limited, but certain facts do emerge. Horace was introduced to Maecenas not earlier than the summer of 39 and therefore was not admitted to his circle before the following spring.³ Accordingly, the journey to Brundisium, described in the fifth Satire, took place either in the autumn of 38, when Maecenas was sent to Athens for a conference with Antony,⁴ or, less probably,⁵ in the spring of 37 before the treaty of Tarentum.⁶ In the tenth Satire, while acknowledging the masters of the principal forms of poetry, Horace says (vv. 44-5):

molle atque facetum
Vergilio adnuerunt gaudentes rure Camenae.

This would be appropriate only after publication of the Eclogues, whose *terminus ad quem* appears to be 37.⁷ Of the remaining Satires of the first book Horace refers to his association with Maecenas in 1, 3, 6, and 9. The first betrays no indication of date. The third was written when the friendship had attained a certain intimacy,⁸ the sixth and ninth when it was well established and Horace had begun to suffer from malicious gossip and the favour-seeking of aspirants to the literary circle. It is surely not unreasonable to suggest that such a situation arose after not more than a year of constant communication and that the works themselves offer no evidence for dating their publication after the end of 37. We are then free to propose that Horace took up residence at his Sabine farm in the early part of 36, a few months before the launching of the final expedition against Sextus Pompeius.

That is the sum of the evidence we have for dating the first Epode. Parts of it tend to be equivocal, but other aspects stand out firmly in support of one of the two viewpoints. 31 B.C., generally accepted as the year of composition, is backed by the Pseudo-Acronian scholia and the assertion of the *Elegia Prima* in

¹ It is true that Sabine farms were not highly valued (see Catull. 44. 1-4). Horace himself says in *Odes* 2. 18. 14 that he is 'satis beatus unicus Sabinis' and in *Odes* 3. 1. 47-8 asks:

cur valle permutem Sabina
divitias operosiores?

But such reflections on the modesty of his farm would not necessarily be suitable in the Epodes, which were published about seven years earlier.

² J. F. D'Alton, *Horace and his Age* (1917), 138, n. 2.

³ See *Sat.* 1. 6. 61-2, 2. 6. 40-2. For the date of *Sat.* 2. 6 see section 2 of Wickham's general introduction to the *Satires*.

⁴ Appian, *BC* 5. 92. 385.

⁵ This is less probable because, if Maecenas went to Brundisium and then had to con-

tinue to Tarentum, it is difficult to understand why Horace should say at the end of the Satire (v. 104):

Brundisium longae finis chartaeque viaeque
est.

⁶ Antony sailed to Brundisium, but when the local inhabitants refused to admit him to the harbour, he made for Tarentum (Plut. *Ant.* 35. 1). Possibly Maecenas was to have met him at Brundisium; he was certainly with Octavian immediately afterwards, when Octavia approached her brother and persuaded him to be peaceable towards Antony in the coming negotiations at Tarentum (Plut. *Ant.* 35. 3).

⁷ See Conington's general introduction to the Eclogues and particularly his remarks preceding Eclogue 10.

⁸ See 63 ff.

Maecenatem that Maecenas was present at the battle of Actium. The value of both authorities is highly questionable. 36 B.C. has the benefit of the more reliable statement of Appian that Maecenas accompanied Octavian in his last attack on Sextus and the consequent probability that Horace's otherwise inexplicable mention of a shipwreck off Palinurus refers to the same expedition. The tone of the Epode and its position at the head of the collection show that there was a well-known occasion on which Horace and Maecenas faced danger together, and in providing the link the advantage seems to lie with the earlier date.

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