

TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SIXTEENTH EPODE

25 f. *simul imis saxa renarint / vadis levata*

I suppose we have all at some time been puzzled by Horace's substitution of boulders for the iron mass that the Phocaeans threw into the sea when they took their oath, and have wondered what poetical purpose the boulders could serve that iron could not. Would not iron in fact better cohere as an image with all the civil war that fills the poem's opening lines and with the agreeable absence of plough-shares and pruning-hooks from the Blessed Isles? Most of all, would it not cohere better with the poem's closing lines?

aere, dehinc *ferro* duravit saecula, quorum
piis secunda vate me *datur fuga*.

What better image to hold the poem together than treating the hated stuff's inability to float as a guarantee of the irreversibility of the escape from the Age of Iron? As for boulders, they make no other appearance in the length and breadth of the poem. So why did Horace write *saxa* when Herodotus had presented him with a *μύδρος σιδήρεος*?

Perhaps one answer might be that he did not know he had. Our information about the Phocaeans' oath comes to us from Herodotus, and so we tend to regard *μύδροι* as *σιδήρεοι* whether we know they were or not (so e.g. 'heavy pieces of iron' for simple *μύδροι* in Fritz–Kapp's translation of *Ath. Pol.* 23.5, 'iron ingots' in the Loeb translation of Plut. *Arist.* 25.1). But if Horace neglected to follow up all the bibliography on the Phocaeans' oath, and knew what he knew about it from commentaries on Call. fr. 388.9 f.

Φωκαέων μέχρις τε μένη (φανῇ Maas) μέγας εἰν ἀλλὶ μύδρος,
ἄχρι τέκη Παλλὰς κῆ γάμος Ἀρτέμιδι,

he may not have shared our conviction that *μύδροι* are iron. Just in itself a *μύδρος* can be either a mass of metal (not necessarily iron) or a mass of rock, and in continuing his allusion to the story of the Phocaeans Horace chose the one it wasn't.

Still, the choice is not an obvious one. Indeed, without pursuing his researches so far as Herodotus, Horace might have found elsewhere in the commentaries on a favourite poet roughly the information we still find there (Schol. Call. *b. Dian.* 49, Pfeiffer 2.60):

μύδρον: τὸν πεπυρακτωμένον σίδηρον, παρὰ τὸ μύρεσθαι καὶ διαρρεῖν.

Between iron and rock the choice of meaning for *μύδρος* was perhaps therefore not quite an indifferent one; there could have been a push in the direction of iron. So why did Horace write *saxa* when he might, even a little more easily, have fixed on a *ferrea moles*?

There may be an answer in the immediate context. Even in making his direct allusion to the Phocaeans, Horace at 19 added the Roman note of *lares patrios*, and since then we have had the ambiguous but anyway Roman *sic placet? an melius quis habet suadere?* of 23; and the Italian theme is for the moment continued in the *ἀδύνατα* that follow 26:

quando
 Padus Matina laverit cacumina,
 in mare seu celsus procurrerit Appenninus.

Perhaps then, in using the floating of boulders as his first *ἀδύνατον*, Horace wanted something unlocalized and general, not the inescapable recurrence to the Phocaeans that a *ferrea moles* would have provided. Whether this is right or not, it is obvious anyway that there was something he valued more highly than obviousness of imagistic connection.

46 *suamque pulla ficus ornat arborem*

The words suggest and the commentators agree that grafting will not be necessary in the Blessed Isles. But what sort of grafting? The fruit-fig grows on its own roots, and was known to the ancients as one of the easiest trees to propagate. Theophrastus warns that varieties do not come true from seed; but the fruit-fig can be and was propagated by layering, by cuttings (either hardwood or softwood), and by planting out suckers. It can also be self-grafted, that is, a tree can be renewed by grafting a young shoot onto an old stock; this technique was also practised in antiquity (Theophr. *Hist. Plant.* 2.5.3). But as the roots of the fruit-fig were subject to viral diseases and various pests (ibid. 4.14.4 f.), self-grafting can hardly have been the dominant method of propagation, with so many ways available of producing clean stock. So why should Horace tell us that in the Fortunate Isles

suamque pulla ficus ornat arborem?

It seems strange to commend a common fruit for doing in the Fortunate Isles what it did anywhere.

The really unblest characteristic of the fig is its tendency to fruitfall; it drops immature but promising fruit in June, and in some years and situations can drop its whole crop. But though 'pulla ficus ornat arborem' ('ripe figs adorn the trees') could be contrasted with an undesirable opposite, 'ficus nondum pulla humi iacet', *suam* would then be otiose. *arbor* (or *arbor* with virtually any other epithet than *sua*) could be in antithesis with *humus*, but *sua arbor* cannot.

Perhaps what we should expect of a blessed clime is that fine fruit should grow on the sturdier and less disease-prone wild fig, the *caprificus* (for its better constitution cf. Theophr. ibid. 4.14.4). Horace's expression might then imply that in our imperfect world the fruit-fig is grafted onto the root of a *caprificus*, but that in the Blessed Isles this would not be necessary. Such grafting does not and apparently did not happen, but something else that may be relevant did. In antiquity the cultivated fig was helped to retain its fruit by the process of 'caprification', that is, by hanging on it or strewing round it fruiting branches of the wild fig or by growing the wild fig near it; and Theophrastus (ibid. 4.14.4) speaks of grafting a bit of wild fig onto a cultivated tree, presumably to make caprification more trouble-free. He also tells us that a black species of wild fig was most prized for caprification (ibid. 2.8.2). If Horace vaguely knew of self-grafting and of such grafting for purposes of caprification, but was a bit muddled about what was grafted onto what and what for, his Fortunate Isles might well produce an ungrafted *caprificus* bearing edible black figs and, as was its wont (Theophr. ibid. 4.14.4), not dropping its fruit. After all, though Theophrastus knew that you cannot turn a wild fig into a fruit-fig by trying hard (ibid. 2.2.12),

he did believe that the change sometimes occurred spontaneously (ibid. 2.3.1); the *manteis*, he tells us, considered it a good omen, and the omen would presumably be better still if in the Fortunate Isles the mutation were standard.

St. Anne's College, Oxford

MARGARET HUBBARD