

A NOTE ON *AGRESTIUM ... VIRORUM ... HUMILIS DOMOS* (HORACE C. 3.1.21/22)

One of the vices attacked by Horace in C. 3.1 is extravagance in building styles, as represented by the man who, *terrae fastidiosus*, constructs a villa out to sea (33–37), and by the lofty structure mentioned in the last stanza,

*cur invidendis postibus et novo
sublime ritu moliar atrium?* (45/46)¹).

Novo...ritu suggests that such extravagance is a specifically modern vice, and this is confirmed both in C. 2.15.10ff, where the sober and unpretentious building styles of former times serve as both foil and indictment of modern practices, and in Sallust's similar comparison at Cat. 12.3 – though one should add the proviso that in moralizing contexts the antinomy ancient-modern is always something relative. In C. 3.1 *sublime ... atrium* (46) is clearly balanced by *humilis domos* (22), though there is apparently no thematic counterpoise to *novo ... ritu*: the explicit temporal contrast of C. 2.15 seems to have been suppressed in 3.1. I propose that Horace has in fact built in this antithesis, though because of its allusive nature it has hitherto gone unnoticed.

Humble dwellings are a characteristic feature of early Rome, especially conspicuous in contrasts with later and more sophisticated times:

*Romulus aeternae nondum formaverat urbis
moenia, consorti non habitanda Remo,
sed tunc pascebant herbosa Palatia vaccae
et stabant humiles in Iovis arce casae* (Tib. 2.5.23–26);

*fictilibus crevere deis haec aurea templa,
nec fuit opprobrio facta sine arte casa* (Prop. 4.1.5f.);

*Roma, nisi immensum vires movisset in orbem,
stramineis esset nunc quoque tecta casis* (Ov. Am. 2.9.17f.).

Cf. also Vergil Ecl. 2.29, *humilis ... casas*. Romulus himself lived in such a rude, thatched hut: Verg. Aen. 8.654, *Romuleoque recens horrebat regia culmo*; Prop. 2.16.19/20, *straminea ... casa* (with Enk's note ad loc.); Ovid Fasti 1.199/200, *casa ... parva*; ibid. 3.183/4, *de canna straminibusque domum*; Dion. Hal. 1.79.11. It became "ein Muster altrömischer Einfachheit" (Bömer ad Fast. 1.199): cf. Valerius Maximus 4.4.11, *namque per Romuli casam perque veteris Capitolii humilia tecta et aeternos Vestae focos, fictilibus etiam nunc vasis contentos, iuro nullas divitias talium virorum paupertati posse praeferri*. It seems a reasonable supposition that

1) For an interpretation of Horace's criticism of this form of extravagance, cf. Woodman's analysis of the ode in D. A. West and A. J. Woodman (edd.), *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus*, Cambridge 1984, 83 ff., with my reply, *AClass* 30 (1987) 11–30.

Horace's readers would readily have made the association between *humilis domos* and the conditions in early Rome – and that lines 21–24 therefore balance not only *sublime* ... *atrium* but also, by implication, *novo ritu*.

Consequently the *agrestes viri* of 21/22 are not random group of unidentified and idealized rustics, but specifically the early Romans. For this supposition there is independent confirmation. The group whose identity in the first Roman ode is only hinted at reappears, in sharper focus, in the cycle's final piece – *sed rusticorum mascula militum / proles* (3.6.37/38). There is no mistaking the echo *rusticorum* – *agrestium*, structurally also functional as a ring composition; by way of thematic reinforcement, *rusticorum* ... *militum* has its counterpart in *agrestium* ... *virorum*, which is not a redundancy but suggests the hardy spirit of these ancients²): this too is a topos attested in connection with the Sabines, Apulians etc. (e.g. Verg. G. 2.167, *genus acre virum*; Hor. Epode 2.42, *pernicis* ... *Apuli*; C. 3.16.26, *impiger Apulus*; cf. Otto, Sprichwörter s.v. 'Sabina'). I submit that the outline which appears in 3.1 – and the reader already suspects to whom Horace is alluding – subsequently assumes a concrete form in 3.6.

Finally, this identification of the *agrestes* with the early Romans has a further thematic implication for C. 3.1. Strophes 5 and 6 form an antithetical pair whose *tertium comparationis* is emphasized by the epanalepsis *somnum* ... *somnus*; in terms of thematic balance it is most appropriate that the foreign milieu suggested by the imagery in the fifth strophe (*destructus ensis, Siculae dapes*) should have its counterpart, in the sixth, in the Roman rustics.

Pretoria

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2) If it is accepted that *virorum* carries this nuance, then *lenis virorum* (22) is a characteristically suggestive iunctura: Horace often juxtaposes two words which, though not grammatically connected, nevertheless stand together in a logical association of similarity or contrast, as e.g. in C. 1.3.10/11, *qui fragilem truci / commisit pelago ratem / primus*, where the respective pairs of adjectives and nouns suggest, through the evocative juxtapositions, the utter temerity of the first seafarer. The word order challenges the careful reader to perceive logical associations or contrasts. In 3.1.22 the gentleness of the sleep beside the (implied) hardness of the rustics is such a touch. (On this technique, see E. Moser, Entspréhung benachbarter Worte und Begriffe in der Sprache der römischen Elegiker, Diss. München 1935; D. West, Horace's poetic technique in the Odes, in Horace, ed. C. D. N. Costa, London 1973, 29 ff.; C. Neumeister, Tibull, Heidelberg 1986, 30–32.)