

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

HORACE *CARMINA* 4. 5. 36–37

In *Carmina* 4. 5 Horace urges Augustus to return to Rome after his prolonged absence: the people yearn for his presence, for it is he who has brought peace, prosperity, order, and security into their lives; after the day's work on the farm they pray to him along with their household gods; finally—and now Horace joins his voice with that of the people—he expresses the general desire (37–40):

“longas o utinam, dux bone, ferias
praestes Hesperiae” dicimus integro
sicci mane die, dicimus uvidi
cum sol Oceano subest.

The question is, what exactly is the “long holiday” that it is hoped Augustus will provide?

According to the most common interpretation, the holiday is a metaphor for the present life of prosperity that is owed to Augustus.¹ I wish first to show that there are difficulties in taking *feriae* in this way, and then to argue that in this context the holiday must be the celebrations anticipated on the emperor's long-awaited return.

The sense required for *feriae* in the standard interpretation does not conform to other metaphorical uses of the word, for there the holiday represents an absence, a release, or a period of rest. The thing in the absence of which the holiday consists is explicitly stated, often by a noun in the genitive case, or else the background with which it is contrasted as a cessation is clearly defined. No support is given for taking *feriae* as a positive idea in itself, standing for a condition of prosperity.²

1. “The reign of Augustus is a perfect holiday; may it be a long one”: so E. C. Wickham, ed., *The Works of Horace*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1896), p. 305. The view is also found ad loc. in the editions of J. G. Orelli, *Q. Horatius Flaccus*,⁴ vol. 1 (Berlin, 1886); T. E. Page, *Horace: Odes* (London, 1883–86); F. Villeneuve, *Horace*⁶ (Paris, 1959); K. F. Quinn, *Horace: The Odes* (London, 1985); and in the discussions of G. Pasquali, *Orazio Lirico* (Florence, 1920), pp. 178–85, H. P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt, 1973), p. 343, and M. C. J. Putnam, *Artifices of Eternity* (Ithaca, 1988), p. 112. A similar idea, but focusing on “peace” rather than “prosperity,” is found in the edition of A. Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Horaz: Oden und Epoden*⁹ (Berlin, 1958); cf. E. Doblhofer, *Die Augustuspanegyrik des Horaz in formalhistorischer Sicht* (Heidelberg, 1966), pp. 100–102, and id., “Horaz und Augustus,” *ANRW* 2. 31, 3 (New York and Berlin, 1981), p. 1979.

2. See *TLL* 6:505. 1–17, dealing with transferred senses of *feriae*. Here we find the following: a parasite's failure to secure an invitation to dinner is described as *esuriales feriae* (Plaut. *Capt.* 468); alternating periods of rest produced by the rhythm of nature are termed *vices feriarum* (Pliny *HN* 17. 210); relaxation from strife is *feriae*: “sine ullis, ut dicitur, feriis multiplicium formas sustinuisse discriminum” (Arn. *Adv. Nat.* 1. 13), “nesciunt ferias in quibus intus est hostis” (*Epist. pontif.* 375 [an. 450], *PL* 50:491A); a truce is *belli feriae* (Varro *Gram.* 124a), and in many late contexts moral or emotional states are represented by *feriae* with a noun in the genitive case (e.g., *lasciviae* or *lacrimarum*).

Now Horace does not furnish a defining idea in the genitive case, and we must find in lines 17–28 of the ode, with their brilliant picture of the benefits of life under Augustus, the context in which the holiday is to be understood. But it is apparent that the distinctive mark of this picture is the emphasis laid upon the positive elements of prosperity, morality, law, and order that inform such a life, so that the other metaphorical uses provide no warrant for the application of the term *feriae* to such a situation. If the word is to be taken in this manner here, it stands alone and should be recognized as unique.

Horace, of course, might well be credited with such an achievement. Yet the context not only does not help to define the metaphorical sense, it actually works against that sense; for though the normal connotations of *feriae* include cessation from work, here we find it in a prayer, uttered morning and evening (38–40), by farmers who work all day and come home to relax at dusk (29–32):

condit quisque diem collibus in suis
et vitem viduas ducit ad arbores;
hinc ad vina redit laetus et alteris
te mensis adhibet deum. . . .

The repetition of morning and evening links *quisque* to *dicimus* (38–39) and is necessary to establish the union of Horace and the people, idealized as farmers. Thus the people on whose lips the wish is found twice daily are envisaged as prosperous but hard-working farmers. Their conditions of life are indeed admirable, but that they should describe them as a holiday is startlingly paradoxical. It may be conceded that some tasks could be performed on feast days;³ nevertheless, *feriae* were typically days of abstention from ordinary activities, including work, and this fact, combined with the uniqueness of the supposed metaphor, makes the interpretation still more dubious.

The problematic status of the metaphor here may be clearly seen if we compare it with the similar context at the end of *Carmina* 4. 15. There Horace declares that, with Augustus as guardian of affairs, civil war and violence will not drive out *otium* (18), and that peoples beyond the border of the Empire will obey the Julian commands. Meanwhile, he goes on, we families in Italy will enjoy our wine, pray to the gods, and praise our heroes “both on working days and on holidays” (25 *et profestis lucibus et sacris*). This happy situation, Horace says, obtains now and will endure while Augustus rules. But it is called *otium*, not *feriae*, and the popular celebration is expressly said to take place on workdays as well as on holidays. It is true that something festive has become a daily event, but in no sense has the distinction between the types of day been obliterated. Augustus’ regime has restored agriculture and the ancient arts that made Italy great (5–14): accordingly, if in a sense a Golden Age has been restored, it is one in which, as in Vergil’s *Georgics*, indolence has no place, one to which the word *otium* readily applies, but hardly *feriae*.⁴ Permanent *feriae* would not, in Roman thinking, be the ground of imperial greatness.

3. Cf. Verg. *G.* 1. 268–69 “festis quaedam exercere diebus / fas et iura sinunt.”

4. Cf. H. Fuchs, *Augustin und der antike Friedensgedank* (Berlin, 1926), pp. 182–85: *pax* refers primarily to the relations between states that are the precondition for internal calm (*otium*); p. 192: *otium* from the time of Cicero may designate order and social peace in the life of the city (cf., e.g., Cic. *Sest.* 98). It is to this concept that the *pax Augusta* corresponds.

Feriae, then, should not be taken to imply that life under Augustus is a perfect holiday. Lines 37–38 of our poem can, however, be read quite differently, in a nonmetaphorical sense, as a prayer not for peace but for a holiday consequent upon the anticipated return of the emperor.⁵ As far as I can see there is no problem with this reading in connection with Roman history, Latin language, or Horatian themes.

Apart from the forty-five official annual holidays known as *feriae stativae* and the movable *feriae conceptivae* whose dates were announced annually, holidays called *feriae imperativae* could be declared by special command for particular occasions. In this last class significant days in the life and military career of the emperor were declared by decree of the senate to be *feriae* and were marked as such in the calendar.⁶ The return home of Augustus after an unexpectedly prolonged sojourn from 16 to 13 B.C. in Gaul and Spain was just such an occasion, and was indeed a spectacular example thereof, for it was in celebration of his return from this absence that the Ara Pacis Augustae was built. The return seemed important to Augustus, for the altar and annual sacrifice are recorded in the *Res Gestae*. It was important to the senate, too, for apart from their ordering the construction of the altar, the day on which it was instituted (4 July 13 B.C.) and the day on which the finished monument was dedicated (30 January 9 B.C.) were both by decree of the senate declared to be *feriae*.⁷ And the event seemed important to Horace also, for at least two odes of his fourth book, 2 and 5, are set in the context of the emperor's absence and desired return.

The former poem shows us how *feriae* is to be understood in the latter. Horace expects that a triumph will be granted Augustus on his return home, but he will leave it to an epic poet to celebrate "the happy days, the public relaxation of the city over the return of brave Augustus won by its prayers, and the forum free of lawsuits" (4. 2. 41–44):

concines laetosque dies et urbis
publicum ludum super impetrato
fortis Augusti reditu forumque
litibus orbum.

At the triumphal procession Horace, along with all the people, will sing in praise and offer sacrifice. Thus in this poem Horace's way of expressing gratitude to Augustus is to imagine the celebrations in Rome that will greet his return. He

5. This interpretation is supported by the passages quoted in the *OLD* s.v. for the meaning "a day of rest, a holiday, leisure." It is so taken by V. Cremona, *La poesia civile di Orazio* (Milan, 1982), pp. 367 and 393, and is implicit, although without discussion of the meaning of *feriae*, in the analysis of the poem by E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1970), p. 448; cf. the suggestive remarks of G. W. Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), p. 164, who sees in *feriae* an actual holiday as well as a reference to the Augustan peace.

6. For *feriae*, see G. Wissowa, "Feriae," *RE* 6 (1909): 2211–13.

7. *Res Gestae* 12 "aram Pacis Augustae senatus pro reditu meo consecrandam censuit." For the calendars, see the Fasti Amertini: "FER(IAE) EX S(ENATVS) C(ONSVLTO) Q(VOD) E(O) D(IE) ARA PACIS AVGVSTAE IN CAMP. MART. CONSTITVTA EST NERONE ET VARO CONSVLIBVS" (*CIL* I. 244); and the Fasti Praenestini: "FERIAE EX S. C. QVOD EO DIE ARA PACIS AVGVSTAE IN CAMP. MARTIO DEDICATA EST DRVSO ET CRISPINO CONS." (*CIL* I. 232).

supposes—wrongly in fact, but it is his assumptions that are important—that Augustus will receive a triumph (49–50 *io Triumphe, non semel dicemus*), and that this will involve an event of some magnitude (*laetos dies*), including public holiday and *feriae* (*forum litibus orbum*).⁸ The emperor's existence is no doubt the guarantee of continued peace and security, but the proof of this stability and the point of emotional focus is his actual return home: "o blessed day!" Horace will sing, *recepto Caesare felix* (47–48).

Now the absence that Horace so fervently hopes to see ended here was unexpectedly prolonged and became in fact that recorded in *Carmina* 4. 5; and this gives us the context required for understanding the popular prayer for *feriae* with which we are concerned. The expected holiday is the occasion of public celebration that would mark the homecoming of the emperor. Given the historical importance of the event, for which the Ara Pacis Augustae is ample testimony, and given Horace's own large assessment of the extent of the celebrations that were to greet the earlier occasion, it is perfectly intelligible that the hoped-for holiday will be long in the simplest sense and that the *longae feriae* will last several days, the length being a measure of the public fervor for Augustus.⁹

The structure of the poem, too, invites this literal interpretation. Initially Horace directs to the emperor, addressed as *dux bone* (5), the request that he should come home; in the following image, which illustrates the nation's desire, the prayers uttered by the yearning mother are for the return of her absent son (9–16); surely the prayer actually uttered by the people, as they address their leader (again) as *dux bone* (37), will have the same theme. One might suppose that the characterization of the people as hard-working farmers is designed to suit the expression of that request as a wish for a holiday. And this structure accords so well with historical realities and with Horatian themes,¹⁰ that it is hardly possible to exclude what is after all the *prima facie* meaning of *feriae*.¹¹

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8. In fact, Augustus left Rome in 16 B.C. to deal with the situation created by the defeat of Lollius at the hands of the Sygambri. Since the Sygambri withdrew and sued for peace, no battle ensued and the triumph anticipated by Horace did not materialize, while Augustus spent two further years in Gaul and Spain before his eventual return to Rome in 13 B.C.; see T. Rice Holmes, *The Architect of the Roman Empire 27 B.C.–14 A.D.* (Oxford, 1931), pp. 53–68.

9. Of course, our poem uses *feriae* in the general sense of "holiday," but the principle that the length of celebration corresponds to the degree of fervor felt for the victor may be illustrated by a concept related to *feriae* in the technical sense, namely, *supplicatio* as "thanksgiving to the gods" (though such days were not necessarily *feriae*). During the late Republic the number of days of *supplicationes* decreed in thanksgiving for a victory increased in step with the ambitions of the generals, from an original single day to ten for Pompey's victory over Mithradates to an eventual fifty for the success of Hirtius, Pansa, and Octavian in the Mutine war. Rome was sensitive to quantity in such matters, as may be seen from *Res Gestae* 24–26, where Augustus records that the 55 occasions on which *supplicationes* were decreed for his victories accounted for a total of 890 days; see Wissowa, "Feriae," col. 2211, and id., "Supplicationes," *RE* 2^e Reihe 7 (1931): 946–48.

10. In other odes Horace imagines celebrations, public and private, to greet the emperor's return (see 3. 14 as well as 4. 2); and in purely private contexts the return of a friend is a matter for a party in 1. 36 and 2. 7.

11. The sense of *praestare* ("furnish," "provide") required for this interpretation is common; see *OLD*, s.v., sections 8 and 9.