

TWO NOTES ON HORACE, *EPODES* (10, 16)(i) *Epode 10: the Mystery of Mevius' Crime*

Horace's tenth *Epode*, an inverse propempticon, calls down dire curses on the head of a man named Mevius as he leaves on a sea-voyage.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have naturally been interested in what Mevius had done to merit such treatment, but answers have been difficult to find, for nothing explicit is said on this topic in the poem; as Leo noted, '[Horatius] ne verbo quidem tam gravis odii causam indicat'.<sup>2</sup> This is in direct contrast with the Strasbourg epode usually attributed to Hipponax (fr.115 West), which served as Horace's model in this poem;<sup>3</sup> there it is clear that the similar curses on a departing sailor are caused by his breaking of oaths to the poet and betrayal of their previous friendship (15–16 ὅς μ' ἠδίκησε, λάξ δ' ἐπ' ὀρκίοις ἔβη, | τὸ πρὶν ἑταῖρος ἑών). One might expect Horace to give some kind of indirect suggestion of the nature of Mevius' offence, but even this is despaired of by Fraenkel:<sup>4</sup> 'There is no hint at the sort of crime which Mevius is said to have committed, nor is anything said about the man himself; he remains an entirely shadowy figure'. The best that scholars have been able to do is to follow the ancient commentary of Porphyrio in suggesting that Horace's Mevius is to be identified with the poetaster attacked by Vergil in *Ecl.* 3.90 'qui Bavium non odit, amet tua carmina, Mevi'. Though it is pleasant to think of Vergil and Horace, perhaps by now friends in the circle of Maecenas, ganging up on a luckless hack, there is, as Fraenkel points out, no mention in the tenth *Epode* that Mevius is a poet, and his literary incompetence, assuming he is Vergil's poet, does not seem to underlie or indeed warrant the bitter imprecations of the poem: Catullus might wish a dire fate on the works of a bad poet (e.g. Volusius – 36.18–20, 95.7–8), but to long for their author's shipwreck and consumption by gulls might indeed seem excessive.

If bad poetry is not Mevius' crime, or if the bad poet Mevius is attacked for another reason, is there any way of establishing what his offence might be? Fraenkel may have despaired too quickly of any hint at this in the poem. Two elements may help here: the sacrifice at the end of the poem, and the myth which Horace chooses to illustrate the theme of shipwreck. At the end of the poem the poet promises a sacrifice if Mevius' end is successfully brought about by his curses (21–4):

opima quodsi praeda curvo litore  
porrecta mergos iuverit,  
libidinosus immolabitur caper  
et agna Tempestatibus.

The offering promised to the Storm-gods, the *Tempestates*, who had a significant cult in Rome and to whom offerings are recorded on inscriptions of Horace's time,<sup>5</sup> is somewhat unusual; the 'agna' is the standard sacrifice to these divinities, as Vergil confirms (*Aen.* 5.772–3 'tris Eryci vitulos et Tempestatibus agnam/caedere'), but what is the 'libidinosus caper' doing here? It seems to be added by Horace for his own

<sup>1</sup> The spelling 'Mevius' is probably right; though 'Maevius' occurs as a well-attested variant at *Epode* 10.1, it is only a later variant at *Eclogue* 3.90, and the two seem sure to be the same name (see below).

<sup>2</sup> F. Leo, *De Horatio et Archilocho* (Göttingen, 1900), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Leo op. cit.; E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 27–32.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. 26.

<sup>5</sup> On the cult of the *Tempestates* cf. Pease on Cicero, *Nat.* 3.51, K. Latte, *Römische Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1975), p. 52; Octavian made dedications to the winds before sailing against Sextus Pompeius in 36 B.C., a time near to the date of Horace's poem – cf. Appian, *B.C.* 5.406.

purposes, and Kiessling–Heinze have suggested that there is some relation to Mevius himself; they are surely right, and the sacrifice of the he-goat seems to repeat at the level of ritual the death of Mevius for which it is a thank-offering. The link between Mevius and a ‘libidinosus caper’ is partly one of odour. He-goats, now as in antiquity, are notable for their rank smell,<sup>6</sup> and bad odour is not only a traditional *τόπος* of ancient (and modern) invective but also occurs as such of Maevius in this same poem; at its beginning, Maevius is attacked as a ‘stinker’ (1–2):

mala soluta navis exit alite,  
ferens *olentem* Maevium...

Thus there is a neat ring-composition between Maevius as ‘stinker’ at the poem’s beginning and as he-goat at its end. But this does not exhaust the goat connection: the ‘caper’ is ‘libidinosus’, showing the lechery which is a traditional attribute of the he-goat,<sup>7</sup> and it is this aspect which may offer some clue to the crime of Maevius. Horace hints that Maevius too is a lecher, a quality appropriate for iambic attack; Archilochus had pilloried an individual for lechery – the flute-player Myklos (fr.270 West).

That this notion is not a complete fantasy seems supported by Horace’s choice of myth. To illustrate his curse of shipwreck he naturally draws on the epic story of the shipwreck of the Greek fleet on the return from Troy, treated in the cyclic *Νόστοι*, and on the fate of Ajax the son of Oileus in particular (11–14):

quietiore nec feratur aequore  
quam Graia victorum manus,  
cum Pallas usto vertit iram ab Ilio  
in impiam Aiacis ratem!

The reason why Pallas turned against Ajax was of course his violation of the virgin priestess Cassandra in Pallas’ own temple, a double offence against the virgin goddess. The story of the rape, with the murder of Astyanax and the sacrifice of Polyxena one of the major atrocities at the fall of Troy, featured in the Cyclic *Ίλιάου Πέποις* and in other subsequent poetry.<sup>8</sup>

In the view of the present writer the choice of this particular myth combines with the parallel with the he-goat to give a broad hint of why Mevius has so offended Horace. The poet selects the example of Ajax in order to connect Mevius with him as a paradigm of sexual incontinence; Ajax was ‘libidinosus’ and deserved punishment, and Horace hopes that the same kind of retribution will be forthcoming for Mevius because his offence is similar. Mevius need not be a rapist to be compared with Ajax; his offence must simply lie within the same field – that of lechery, lack of sexual restraint, manifested perhaps in ways which affected the poet himself (we can only speculate here).

This subtle exposition of the reason for attack perhaps supports the identity of the Mevius of *Epode* 10 with the Mevius of *Eclogue* 3. The literary manner in which Horace alludes to the crime of Mevius suits an attack on a fellow poet, and is also a mode of expression which would be appreciated by the other poets of the circle of Maecenas. Indeed, Horace’s poem recalls the similar type of invective current in the literary circle of Catullus and likewise primarily intended for consumption by

<sup>6</sup> This is shown most vividly by the use of ‘caper’ and similar words for the smell of the armpits – cf. *Epode* 12.5, Ellis and Kroll on Catullus 69.6.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bomer on Ovid, *Met.* 13.791 and 7.321, Suetonius, *Tib.* 45.

<sup>8</sup> For the evidence (and the evidence of archaic art) cf. Austin on Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.403; a recent addition is Archilochus fr.138.16ff. The story was favoured in Hellenistic literature (Lycophron, *Alexandra* 352–60, Callimachus, *Aetia* fr.35 with Pfeiffer’s note).

connoisseurs who knew the victim: Mevius, identified with a 'libidinosus caper', gets worse treatment than Catullus' Rufus, who simply has a 'trux caper' under his armpit (69.5–6), but his offence would seem to resemble that of Catullus' Aemilius, who 'fuit multas et se facit esse venustum' (97.9).

## (ii) Epode 16: Horace and Herodotus

In *Epode* 16 Horace urges to an imaginary civic assembly the fantastic removal of the citizens of Rome to the Isles of the Blest, an ironic solution to Rome's self-destruction in the continuing civil wars. The example of the Phocaeans is cited as a precedent for such a wholesale move (17–22):

nulla sit hac potior sententia, Phocaeorum  
velut profugit exsecrata civitas  
agros atque Lares patrios, habitandaque fana  
apris reliquit et rapacibus lupis,  
ire pedes quocumque ferent, quocumque per undas  
Notus vocabit aut protervus Africus.

As has long been noted, Horace takes the story of the Phocaeans from the first book of Herodotus (1.165), where the Phocaeans moved *en bloc* from the Ionian coast to Corsica rather than suffer Persian domination. This note will argue that there is another and more subtle reference to Herodotus 1 later in *Epode* 16, a reference explaining a point which otherwise seems obscure.

In the description of the Isles of the Blest towards the end of the poem, the poet stresses that such a paradise will not be disturbed by anything like the traditional nautical expeditions of mythology (57–60):

non huc Argo contendit remige pinus,  
neque impudica Colchis intulit pedem;  
non huc Sidonii torserunt cornua nautae  
laboriosa nec cohors Ulixei...

The allusions to the stories of the Argonauts and of Odysseus and his crew are evident; that to the Sidonians is less clear. The passage, like much in the poem,<sup>9</sup> clearly owes something to the fourth *Eclogue* of Vergil – cf. *Ecl.* 4.34–9:

alter erit tum Tiphys et altera quae vehat Argo  
delectos heroas; erunt etiam altera bella  
atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mittetur Achilles.  
hinc, ubi firmata virum te fecerit aetas,  
cedet et ipse mari vector, nec nautica pinus  
mutabit merces...

Here the gathering strength of Vergil's Golden Age is shown by the gradual cessation of sea-voyages, an obvious parallel with Horace's Islands of the Blest, a similarly utopian dimension where such voyages will be excluded. Horace also takes note of Vergil's examples; that of the Argonauts is repeated, while that of the voyage of Achilles to Troy, where he was to cause destruction in the *Iliad* and die himself, is substituted by the voyage connected with the other great Homeric epic, the equally disastrous journey of the companions of Odysseus, none of whom were to return to Ithaca. This substitution is more than simple variation; with the inviolability of his Isles of the Blest in mind, Horace clearly wishes to recall the calamitous behaviour of Odysseus' crew on its visit to the similarly paradisiacal Island of the Sun (*Od.* 12.260ff.), behaviour which is not to be permitted in his ideal refuge. The element added to Vergil by Horace is the allusion to the Sidonians. This might be suggested

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Fraenkel op. cit. (n. 23), pp. 50–3.

by the general reference in the Vergil passage to trading ('vector', 'mutabit merces'), recalling the traditional activities of the Sidonians or Phoenicians in the merchant marine, but in my view there ought to be another explanation; the references to the Argo and to the crew of Odysseus are both to mythological or literary voyages, and it would be strange if the allusion to the Phoenicians were simply factual and had no literary aspect.

Here we return to Herodotus 1. The well-known opening of that book refers to clashes between Europe and Asia which provided precedents for the Persian Wars. Hence the Phoenicians play a prominent role; Herodotus begins by quoting the views of the Persians, who blame the original quarrel between East and West on expeditions of the Phoenicians to Greece to kidnap women (1.1.1). Furthermore, this original act of the Phoenicians began a series of further East/West kidnappings which, in addition to that of Helen from Sparta, included that of Medea from Colchis (1.2.2). Here surely we have a reason for the otherwise mysterious occurrence of the Phoenicians alongside the Argonauts and the crew of Odysseus in Horace's list; these same three elements, Phoenician sailing, the voyage of the Argo with Medea and a voyage connected with the Trojan War (the kidnap of Helen, matching the wanderings of Odysseus' crew) appear in a well-known sequence in Herodotus 1, and Horace is taking over with some adaptation material from a book which he had already quarried in this same poem for the story of the Phocaeans. The violators of peace between Europe and Asia in Herodotus become in Horace potential violators of the tranquillity of his Isles of the Blest; their role in Herodotus as provokers of war is appropriate in Horace, where they are to be barred from the region which is a refuge from war, albeit of a civil variety.

Corpus Christi College, Oxford

S. J. HARRISON

### A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR?

dicitur Aegyptus caruisse iuuantibus arua  
imbris atque annos sicca fuisse nouem,  
cum Thrasius Busirin adit monstratque piari  
hospitis adfuso sanguine posse louem.

Ovid, *Ars amatoria* 1.647–50

Ovid is following Callimachus here, but the surviving fragments do not include the name of Busiris' adviser.<sup>1</sup> It is given as Thrasius by Hyginus (*Fab.* 56), or at least by his editors.<sup>2</sup> However, most of the MSS of Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 2.116 (5.11.6)) call him *Φράσιος*.<sup>3</sup> This was emended by Aegius (1555) to *Θράσιος* to conform to the evidence of Ovid and Hyginus, but the correction is quite uncalled for. The name Phrasius is entirely appropriate for a seer, whose business is to show or declare (*φράζειν*) what is obscure, and is of the well-known type of significant name<sup>4</sup> exemplified by e.g.

<sup>1</sup> See frs. 44–7 Pf., *SH* 252, and A. S. Hollis, *Ovid, Ars Amatoria Book I* (Oxford, 1977), Appendix IV.

<sup>2</sup> *Thrasius* is Micyllus' restoration of *thasius* in the lost Freising codex, on which see M. D. Reeve in L. D. Reynolds (ed.), *Texts and Transmission* (Oxford, 1983), p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> One has *φράγιος*. See also Nonnus, *Dion.* 32.234, where Keydell has now corrected the accentuation to *Φρασίος*, as called for by Herodian (*Technici Reliquiae*, ed. A. Lentz [*Gramm. Graec.* iii.1], i [Leipzig, 1867], p. 122.6–8 = Arcadius, *De accentibus*, p. 40.22 Barker). Cf. H. W. Chandler, *A Practical Introduction to Greek Accentuation*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford, 1881), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> See the bibliography at (edd.) B. L. Hijmans and R. L. van der Paardt, *Aspects of Apuleius' Golden Ass* (Groningen, 1978), pp. 107–22 and nn. 8–10.