

Hearing Horace: The Alcaic Stanza in the *Grammatici Latini* and *Odes* I.9

This paper considers the way the Romans defined and explained the alcaic meter, the meter used most often in Horace's *Odes*, and how this affects our reading of his alcaic poems. A major aspect of the ancient description of the alcaic meter was an emphasis on the ictus. Ictus was an artificial accent used by ancient grammarians to help students scan a line aloud (Becker 313-22). The interplay of ictus and accent (known from hexameter poetry) can be useful in other meters, including lyric. This paper will use *Odes* I.9 to illustrate the importance of ictus in a Horatian poem.

The consistent pattern of the alcaic stanza is as follows (Raven, Boldrini, Halporn-Ostwald-Rosenmeyer, Nisbet and Hubbard, Drexler, and Crusius-Rubenbauer):

□ □ u □ □ || □ u u □ u x (|| marks the expected caesura)
 □ □ u □ □ || □ u u □ u x
 □ □ u □ □ □ u □ x
 □ u u □ u u □ u □ x

The metrical composition of the individual lines and the stanza is variously explained by the ancient *grammatici Latini* (collected in Keil's eight volumes). For example, Marius Victorinus divides the hendecasyllabic first two lines into halves (Keil VI.166, 172, 268); the first half is an iambic syzygy (x □ u □) plus half a foot (□), while the second half is two dactyls. This division puts a probable ictus (|) on the second, fourth, sixth, and ninth syllables:

| | | |
 x □ u □ | □ | □ u u | □ u u

Another *grammaticus*, Caesius Bassus, posits a choriambic ending: a trochee (□ u) and an iamb (u □) joined with an iamb (Keil VI.268). This is different from Victorinus' division because it adds an ictus on the final syllable:

| | | | |
 x □ u □ □ || □ u | u □ | u □

The enneasyllabic third line is slower, with three long syllables in the middle. Marius Victorinus nevertheless describes it in terms of iambs, calling it a hypercatalectic iambic dimeter (Keil VI.167). Hypercatalectic here means a syllable has been added on to the end of the line. The ictus thus would fall:

| | | |
 x □ u □ | x □ u □ | x

He then calls the decasyllabic fourth line a hypercatalectic dactylic trimeter (in spite of a short penultimate syllable), and the ictus would fall as follows:

| | | |
 □ u u | □ u u | □ u u | □

Victorinus provides other alternatives; he calls the decasyllabic fourth line two dactyls (□ u u) joined with two trochees (VI.111 Keil), putting an ictus on the first, fourth, seventh and ninth syllables.

| | | |
 □ u u | □ u u | □ u | □ u

He also calls this line an archebulean with a foot and a half removed from the beginning (VI.126 and VI.269 Keil):

| | | |
 x □ u u □ u u □ u u □ u □ □

As the examples indicate, one of the preoccupations of the *grammatici Latini* is the interchangeability of the different meters. Marius Victorinus and Caesius Bassus both tend to explain the lines of the alcaic stanza in terms of iambs and dactyls (Keil VI.166.10-167.2 and VI.268.10-269.15). Why do they both use iambic meter to explain alcaics? One explanation explored in this paper is that iambic meter was more familiar to the audience, therefore easier to use as a basis for describing a less common meter. The different divisions result in variations in the position of the ictus, but not radical differences.

Horace's *Odes* I.9 (*vides ut alta*) can serve as a model of an alcaic; as one of the Parade Odes, it is designed for this purpose. In light of the treatment of the meter by the *grammatici Latini*, this paper will consider metrical and rhythmical characteristics of the poem, especially the relation of accent to ictus.

The prosodic features of the alcaic stanza, including the relation of accent to ictus, become more apparent and significant when we try to see them from an emic perspective with the guidance of the *grammatici*. This paper will explore the poetic importance of those and similar features, in order to better understand Horace's verse. The awareness of the way this meter was understood in ancient times can help us to hear and understand the rhythmically significant features of Horace's Latin lyric.