

Roman Epebophilia: The Case of Horace's *Odes*

This paper examines the latent eroticization of young Roman men in certain of Horace's *Odes* as a way of refining our understanding of Roman sexuality. Building on the work done on persona-theory (which reaches back to Anderson 1982), and especially on the insight of Oliensis 1998 that personae are responsive to the realities of life at Rome despite their artificial nature, I argue that persona-construction applies in the erotic realm as well as in sociopolitical hierarchies, where they are likewise indicative of the breadth of Roman sexual behavior. Accordingly we can observe the creation of a range of sexual personae in the *Odes*, each reflective of real Roman sexual behavior if not of the authentic attitude of Horace himself. Among these personae is an epebophile, a Horace whose primary erotic object is not a woman or a boy but a young man, as in *Odes* 1.8, 3.7, 3.12, and the Ligurinus *Odes* of 4.1 and 4.10.

Despite nods in this direction (Leach 1994; Oliensis 2007), Horatian scholars have ignored these poems as evidence of male homosexual behavior counter to the norms posited by such scholars of Roman sexuality as Williams 1999. Ligurinus, Sybaris, and the other erotic objects of Horace's epebophilic gaze are not boys, slaves, or the hairless, effeminate men often seen in Roman literature as the focus of an older male's desire, but physically mature Roman youths characterized by distinctly male behavior. While the boys mentioned by Horace as potential love objects are at best superficially described, these young men are given detailed descriptions (e.g., Sybaris' often-bruised arms in 1.8) and personalities (e.g., Ligurinus' callousness in 4.10). Further, these male erotic objects are engaged in athletic activities on the Campus Martius, which both confirms them as young freeborn Roman men and allows Horace to express epebophilia through the eroticization of athletics (Scanlon 2002; Hubbard 2003). I therefore argue in conclusion that the case of Horace's epebophile persona provides additional

evidence that Roman homosexuality was not exclusively pederastic in nature, and that these male characters are essential to a better understanding of sexuality both in the *Odes* and in Rome.

Select Works Cited

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