

## Horace as *Romanae fidicen lyrae*

As in the works of many Augustan poets, peace plays a prominent thematic role in Horace's *Odes*. The poet's rich engagement with the theme has led to many fruitful readings, and in this paper I propose to offer a brief but substantive addition to current Horatian scholarship. In Horace's *Odes*, the poet openly calls himself *Romanae fidicen lyrae*. This is a significant title in light of the circumstances in which Horace was writing, namely, the *Pax Romana*. An analysis of Horace's poetry reveals that the poet associates stringed instruments--the *lyra*, *barbitos*, *cithara*, and *fidis*--with the notion of peace, and, as a result, the title Horace gives himself in 4.3.23 has a twofold meaning. Not only is he calling himself the poet of Rome, but also the peace bringer of Rome, an identification that seems to equate him with or even elevate him above Augustus himself.

My argument, though unique, dovetails with current scholarly assessments of the *Odes*. Many scholars, for instance, find Horace's poetry intentionally tranquil in nature. Gregson Davis argues that the poet Horace "defines his lyric vocation by insisting on its 'soft,' anti-militaristic character" (1991). In addition, Elizabeth Haight suggests that Horace "would bring into Latin poetry a great new theme for a new world, not battles won and cities overthrown but the *Pax Augusta*, the peace that closed Janus' doors..." (1946). Other scholars recognize Horace's contribution to the *Pax Romana*, but do not specifically attribute the *fidicen* title with the other occurrences of the *lyra* and its harp-like relatives (Garrison, 1991; Marks, 2008).

An analysis of the poems, however, suggests a metaphorical value for the lyre and other stringed instruments. Examples abound (1.6, 1.15, 1.17, 1.32, 1.33, 3.1, and 4.15) though I will focus only on a few passages, such as those from *Ode* 1.6. In that poem, Horace's use of the adjective *imbellis* is one example of his categorization of these instruments with peace:

*...Pudor*

*Imbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat*

*Laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas*

*Culpa deterere ingeni...(Odes 1.6.9-12)*

*Shame and the powerful Muse*

*of the unwarlike lyre forbid me*

*to diminish the praises of egregious Caesar*

*and your praises through the blame of my wit...*

Horace also goes on to say in the same poem that he will not sing of actual battles, but flirtatious ones, again conveying the idea that these instruments are not for use in battle or even to sing of battle. He writes:

*Nos convivia, nos proelia virginum*

*Sectis in iuvenes unguibus acrium*

*Cantamus vacui, sive quid urimur,*

*Non praeter solitum leves. (Odes 1.6.17-20).*

*We sing of banquets, battles of fierce virgins*

*with nails cut against young men,*

*we sing whether free or fickle if we are consumed,*

*but not beyond custom...*

Horace uses references of this sort repeatedly to parallel the lyre with peace-bringing, which culminates in his nomination of himself as *fidicen Romanae lyrae*. He thus subtly implies that he is the true peace-bringer of Rome.

This topic reflects the importance of Horace's role not only in Roman society, but also within the line of Roman poets. He emphasizes his own value to show that Augustus may have instituted the *Pax Romana*, but he preserves and even advances it through his poetry using the metaphor of the lyre as peace. Horace must have valued greatly the peace of Augustus' reign considering the chaos and warfare he had seen firsthand in Rome in his younger days (Haight, 1943; Showerman, 1991). As a result, he wrote poetry that not only presents themes of peace, but, as he implies, peace itself, which even somewhat contravenes traditional Roman virtues.

It is difficult to examine every use of every instrument mentioned in the *Odes*, but through a detailed focus of a few, there is a direct correlation formed between lyres and peace. Horace's subtle use of instruments adds nuance to the line of thought already embarked upon by scholars concerning Horatian themes. The poet's implicit claim that he, not war or politics, truly maintains and advances Rome's long-sought *pax* via the *Odes*, however, has the potential to open new avenues of investigation into Horace's attitude towards the *Pax Augusta*. This paper, I hope, will offer a starting point for new investigations in Horatian studies.

#### Works Cited

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