

Doctus et Pheobi Chorus et Dianae: The Carmen Saeculare and Moral Education in Horace's Corpus

Scholars have traditionally studied the *Carmen Saeculare* separately from Horace's corpus because of its unique position as a commissioned piece performed during the *Ludi Saeculares* (Putnam 2008; Günther 2013). Even scholars who have attempted to move on from the *Carmen's* origins have focused on its uniqueness rather than its relation to Horace's other works (Fraenkel 1980; Barchiesi 2002). This paper argues that regardless of the unique circumstances of its composition, the *Carmen Saeculare* can and should be studied as part of Horace's corpus, rather than set apart from it.

A case study for the benefits of such an integrative approach is the development of the theme of moral education in Horace's writings. In his earlier works, Horace condemns the state of moral education in Rome: in *Ode* 3.6 (published in 29 BCE), he laments the depravity within the Roman family, which resulted from the abandonment of proper values (*iam nunc et incestos amores de tenero meditatur ungui*, lines 23-24); He then associates it with the internal strife plaguing Rome and its inability to handle outside threats (*paene occupatam seditionibus delevit Urbem Dacus et Aethiops*, lines 13-14). The failure of good moral education has led to destruction, and the next generation will pay the price for it (*delicta maiorum immeritus lues Romane*, lines 1-2).

However, in *Ode* 4.4 (published after 14 BCE), Horace employs the same themes to convey a much more optimistic idea by associating Augustus' good education of Tiberius and Drusus with their military successes (*sed diu lateque victrices catervae consiliis iuvenis revictae sensere... quid indoles nutrita faustis sub penetralibus posset*, lines 22-28) and stressing the need

for education to develop a good character (*doctrina sed vim promovet insitam, rectique cultus pectora roborat*, lines 33-34).

The reason for the change in tone can be explained through the *Carmen Saeculare*: the poem was performed as part of a celebration of a new age of morality and prosperity in Rome, and served to convey these ideals. Horace did so in two ways: first, he described the coming of a new age and restoration of long-neglected values (*Iam Fides et Pax at Honos Pudorque priscus et neglecta redire Virtus*, lines 57-60). Second, he used the setting of the performance to celebrate the restoration of moral education: the *Carmen* was performed by a choir of boys and girls, and the poem concludes with the singers proclaiming themselves educated, having sung about the return of good morals to the city (*doctus et Phoebi chorus et Dianae dicere laudes*, lines 75-76). Thus, Horace connects the Augustan idea of a return to morality with his long-favored theme of moral education.

Whether the *Carmen* is a piece of political propaganda or a case of poetic self-expression remains debated and will likely never be resolved. However, this question does not negate an examination of the *Carmen* as part of Horace's corpus and its effects on his later writing. In the case of moral education, it is clear that the *Carmen* was pivotal for Horace, as it led to a significant change in his writing about the subject—a change that remained persistent in his later poems, as is evident in *Ode* 4.4.

This paper situates the *Carmen Saeculare* thematically in Horace's corpus. It moves on from the dichotomy between propaganda and authenticity on which scholarly debate has focused, and thus allows a new consideration of the *Carmen*'s relationship to prior and later poems and its role in Horace's development as a poet.

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