

The Sacred Countryside: Hellenistic Poetics and Roman Religion in Tibullus 2.1

Tibullus 2.1 is set during a rustic festival often identified as the Ambarvalia, a traditional rite of agricultural purification. Within this pastoral setting, Tibullus employs refined Hellenistic literary techniques, most notably inspired by Callimachus' *Hymns*, to elevate his portrayal of Roman religion beyond mere ritual description and to engage with the broader religious transformations of Augustan Rome.

This paper argues that Tibullus 2.1 reflects the complexities of contemporary Augustan religion through its engagement with the Hellenistic poetic tradition. By blending Hellenistic poetic techniques with Roman imagery and rituals, Tibullus mirrors the evolving spiritual and cultural dynamics of his time.

The first section of the paper explores Tibullus' use of ritual language and sacred imagery, such as calls for silence (*faveat*, 2.1.1), purification (*lustramus*, 2.1.1; *purgamus*, 2.1.17), and offerings to the Lares, to evoke older, more traditional forms of Roman piety. The second section examines how Hellenistic influences shape Tibullus' poetic technique, illuminating how he reinterprets contemporary religious change through an Alexandrian lens. For example, the phrase *ritus... a prisco traditus auo* (2.1.2), referring to rites passed down from generation to generation, captures this tension between tradition and innovation. Similar phrasing appears in Callimachus, *Hymn 5.36–7*, revealing Tibullus' deep intertextual engagement with Hellenistic poetry. Within the Augustan context, such language takes on additional resonance, it aligns with the regime's emphasis on ancestral piety and continuity, reinforcing the illusion that the Rome of Augustus' day was the same as that of the forefathers. Through this fusion of poetic

inheritance and political ideology, Tibullus both participates in and subtly reflects upon the Augustan project of redefining Roman religious identity.

Bibliography

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