

Smoothing the Sea and Soothing the State: the Dioscuri and Augustus in Horace's *Odes*

In *Odes* 1.12, in the center of a lengthy list of gods, heroes, and men whom he is proposing to sing about, a list which culminates in Augustus himself, Horace devotes nearly two full stanzas to Castor and Pollux, more lines that he gives to any of the other gods, heroes, or men in the ode. A few scholars have noted the length and placement of these stanzas (Fraenkel 1957, 294; Brown 1991, 329; West 1995, 58; Syndikus 2001, 142). Fraenkel and Syndikus suggest a connection between these lines and the end of the ode: Fraenkel parenthetically suggests a connection between the Dioscuri and the rule of the *princeps* in the final stanza, and Syndikus briefly connects the soothing power of the Dioscuri to Orpheus' and Jupiter's powers from the beginning of the ode and Augustus' calm rule at the end.

I argue that the Dioscuri are not merely part of a larger theme in the ode but rather that they are central to that theme and comprise its primary image. Throughout 1.12 there is an emphasis on calming or soothing which begins with Orpheus' power over rivers and winds in lines 9-10, continues in Jupiter's power over the sea, land, and weather in lines 15-16, and climaxes with nearly two stanzas on the Dioscuri's power to sooth a stirred-up, stormy sea in lines 27-32. The calming becomes less about the natural world and more about the political sphere as the poem progresses, with the "quiet reign" of Numa Pompilius in 33-34. The Dioscuri are brought back by the reference to the "Julian star" in line 46—parallel to the "star" of the Dioscuri in line 28—which introduces the concluding stanzas describing Augustus' reign which will be marked by the subjugation of foreign enemies (53-56) and Augustus' ruling "fairly" (*aequus*, 57) a "happy world" (*laetum orbem*, 57). Augustus' reign is described in terms that suggest the pacification of the sea: *aequus* with its other meaning of "level" or "smooth" and its connections to *aequor*, "the sea, esp. considered as calm and flat" (*OLD* s.v.), suggests that

Augustus' rule will be peaceful and calm, and his soothing effect on his subjects is parallel to the Dioscuri's soothing effect on the sea. The final three lines of the last stanza continue the metaphor of calming the sea and detail exactly how Augustus can soothe his stormy empire. In lines 58-60, Jupiter is described as causing thunder and lightning, creating a storm, to strike *parum castis lucis* (59-60), sacred groves that have become polluted. A lightning strike in a sacred grove was viewed as a sign that the grove had been polluted and needed to be purified. In order to stop the lightning, one has to heed its message; metaphorically, this is just what Augustus can do for Rome through putting an end to civil war and through his moral reforms.

Furthermore, the Dioscuri can be observed reverberating throughout *Odes* 1-3, each time in connection with Augustus and his rule. I argue that in 3.3, 1.3, and 3.29, the other three odes in Books 1-3 in which the Dioscuri appear, the Dioscuri function as Horace's emblem for the soothing effect he hopes Augustus' rule will have on the recently civil war embroiled Rome.

Bibliography

- Brown, R. D. 1991. "*Catonis Nobile Letum* and the List of Romans in Horace *Odes* 1.12." *Phoenix* 45:326-340.
- Fraenkel, E. 1957. *Horace*. Oxford.
- Syndikus, H. P. 2001. *Die Lyrik des Horaz. Eine Interpretation der Oden*. 2nd edition. 2 vols. Darmstadt.
- West, D. 1995. *Horace Odes I: Carpe Diem*. Oxford.