Delendane est Karthago? Metrical Wordplay and the Text of Horace *Odes* 4.8

Horace *Odes* 4.8 has often troubled critics: both the text itself and its interpretation have been intensely debated. The major textual problems are as follows: first, the ode violates 'Meineke's Law' insofar as it is the *only* ode in Horace's oeuvre which cannot be divided into quatrains; second, Horace seems to conflate Scipio Africanus Maior and his adopted son; and third, line 17 (*non incendia Karthaginis impiae*) violates the metrical norm whereby the lesser asclepiadian line must have a caesura after the first choriamb — that is, it should fall in the middle of *Karth-* || *-aginis* (see Thomas 2011:185–6, 190–1; Fedeli 2008:367, 381–88).

These considerations have led some scholars to delete either two or six lines; for those who wish to delete, line 17 is invariably removed on metrical grounds. I will review the arguments for and against these deletions, before focussing on the (apparently) missing caesura in line 17.

Since at least the edition of Ritter (1856:375), some have argued that this line is in fact metrically un-problematic: the word *Karthago* in Punic was originally a compound, whose two elements may be parsed as 'New City', and the Romans were fully aware of this (see Servius on Vergil *A.*1.366). Furthermore, in other asclepiadean verses Horace occasionally allows the caesura to fall after the prepositional prefix of compounds (e.g., *Odes* 1.18.16, *per-* || *-lucidior*; *Odes* 2.12.25, *de-* || *-torquet*). At *Odes* 4.8.17, then, Horace has simply taken advantage of this metrical 'licence' and allowed the caesura to fall between the two elements of *Karth-ago*.

This argument, however, has not convinced all (skepticism: Fedeli 2008:385, Kovacs 2009:26). I believe that Ritter's analysis was a step in the right direction, but that the issue needs to be framed differently. The metrical oddity is not exactly a non-problem; it is an *apparent*

problem which resolves itself for the learned reader, once it is seen as an example of metrical and etymological wordplay typical of the Augustan poets working in the Alexandrian tradition.

Key evidence for this view — what has been lacking in previous treatments — comes from Vergil. On the level of etymological wordplay, Vergil himself plays upon the original meaning of *Karthago* at *Aeneid* 1.297 (*novae pateant Karthaginis arces*) and *Aeneid* 1.366 (*novae Karthaginis arcem*). The close juxtaposition of *novae* ('new') and the name *Karthago* has been understood as an example of the typically Hellenistic-Augustan practice of 'glossing', wherein the *poeta doctus* signals, to his equally learned ideal readers, his awareness of a foreign word's root meaning (on glossing, Ferriss-Hill 2014:559; on these passages, O'Hara 1996:123–4). And on the level of metrical play, a suggestive comparison (if not an exact parallel), can be seen in *Aeneid* 1.37 (… *mene in-* || *-cepto desistere victam*), where, if the line is divided at the usual masculine caesura (thus splitting *incepto*), angry Juno's first word in the epic is *mēnin*, or rather μῆνιν ('wrath'), the first word of the *Iliad* (O'Hara 1996:115–6).

Odes 4.8.17, therefore, ought not to be deleted; to the contrary, the splitting of the two halves of *Karthago* ('new city') over the caesura is an erudite example of Augustan wordplay. Horace, in fact, out-does Vergil by employing meter alone to signal his awareness of the original meaning of *Karthago*, without any explicit translation.

This conclusion raises new implications for the meaning and the tone of the ode. More than one reader has felt that, even as Horace moves in these lines towards a Pindaric gesture of praise, his language becomes prosaic or 'pedestrian' (Quinn 1996:313). Richard Thomas even speaks of 'wilful unpoetic writing' (2009:191) and suggests that the poem, in its wariness to enter politics, 'artfully fail[s] as encomi[um]' (2009:186). I believe this is correct; but I would revise the analysis slightly, pointing out that although the poem performs its Pindaric,

encomiastic function with superficial awkwardness, underneath the surface it performs its Callimachean, poetic function perfectly well. Via the metrical and etymological wordplay in line 17, while the Pindaric swan seems to croak, the Callimachean bee buzzes along happily, painstakingly (*per laborem* | *plurimum, Odes* 4.2.29–30) crafting labored and elaborate verse (*operosa… carmina, Odes* 4.2.31–32).

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