

An Augustan *Carmen*: The *Carmen Saeculare* as Sound

The ritual performance of the *Carmen Saeculare*, the only Latin poem with a known performance date, ushers the Roman people into a new, Augustan *saeculum*. The sounds of this performance generated by the chorus reciting the *Carmen* and the audience receiving it, guide the hearers through a coming-of-age into imperial Rome. Poet, patron, performers, and listeners all contribute to the climate of fluctuating sounds. Rather than solely an analysis of the *Carmen* as a text or the *Carmen* as a performance, I evaluate the *Carmen Saeculare* as sound within a performance, transmitted by the voices of the chorus to the audience. As sound, in contrast to visual constructs, the *Carmen Saeculare* demonstrates the ability of a *carmen* to appeal to the ear and the λόγος (Armstrong 1995; Habinek 2009).

My approach to the *Carmen Saeculare* differs from others in that I study the notes that comprise the composition of the performance. I do not disagree with Putnam's (2000) reading of the *Carmen* or Habinek's (2009) analysis of Roman song, but explore the audible components of the entire performance recreated from the text and audience sounds in other Roman media. I propose that the sounds of the *Carmen* itself and the sounds of the audience as its recipients transmit the new Augustan *saeculum* from the realm of the gods, through Augustus and his poet Horace, to the population of Rome.

The chorus of young boys and girls are integral to the *Carmen Saeculare* as sound because it is their voices that are heard; their voices guide and instruct the audience through the rite of passage from one *saeculum* to the next. In the first eight lines, the bright, heavenly bodies are benevolent to the Roman people, providing them the means to complete their daily, monthly, and annual lives. In lines 1-4, the alliteration of the 'c' sounds travel from the realm of the gods (*caeli... colendi... culti... precamur... sacro*) to the mortal moment of the ritual and the voices of

the chorus in lines 5-8 (*lectas... castros... placuere... colles... dicere carmen*). Augustus as the intermediary between gods and men interprets the *mores* handed down from the gods to direct the youths on how to behave as adults (Habinek 2009).

Within the *Carmen*, the use of Sapphic meter demonstrates audibly the oncoming maturity and marriage of the chorus. The historical Sappho composed songs for girl-choruses and trained them herself, making the use of Sapphic meter in a public setting appropriate for a young, liminal chorus (Ingalls 2000). Horace's use and adaptation of the Sapphic meter directs the chorus and Rome through their liminal state. Elsewhere in his works, Horace addresses the poet's role in teaching a chorus of boys and girls to make the proper sounds (*Ep.* 2.1; *C.* 4.6). Beyond their visual presence, the chorus audibly demonstrates their own liminal status as they near marriageability as well as Rome's after adopting Augustus' moral reform the year before (lines 13-20; Putnam 2000).

The ritual audience, as recipients of the *Carmen Saeculare* and participants in the ritual, hear and interpret the *Carmen* as individuals as well as a collective. During Roman *ludi*, the emperor and the audience were co-participants in the event, and audience members would often address the emperor with petitions during the performance (Aldrete 1999). The sounds of petitions would not necessarily undermine the performance of the *Carmen* because these sounds were expected and accepted (Horsfall 2003; Manuwald 2011). Other sounds concurrent with the sounds of the performance would have expressed verbal critique of the performance and its themes (Horsfall 2003; Aldrete 1999).

The sounds of the crowd and the sounds of the *Carmen* interact to create a clamorous polyphony: the sounds of imperial authority and the audiences' now-silent but once audible

reaction. As sound, the *Carmen Saeculare* navigates the oncoming maturity of Rome under Augustus, audibly leading its recipients into a new *saeculum*.

Bibliography

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