

Musarum Sacerdos: Priesthood, Politics, and Persona in Horace, *Odes* 3.1

Ode 3.1 opens with Horace defining his poetic persona as *Musarum sacerdos*, a unique collocation in the *Odes* and an unexpected shift from his previous self-identification as *vates*. Scholars have addressed the terms *vates* and *sacerdos*, but few discuss the change in terminology at the beginning of 3.1. Günther 2013 argues that *sacerdos* is more prestigious than *vates* implies, but he does not explain the difference inherent in the terms. Commager 1967 states that the *Musarum sacerdos* collocation separates the Roman Odes from the rest of the poems and allows Horace to take on a public role, but he does not discuss the significance of these claims. Lyne 1995 disambiguates between poet as *sacerdos* and as *vates*, arguing that priesthood comes with a heightened class status.

Rather than privileging the terms *vates* and *sacerdos* as a vertical hierarchy of prestige or power, I argue that Horace uses the phrase *Musarum sacerdos* to signal a new goal for his poetry in the rest of 3.1 and throughout the Roman Odes as a whole. I suggest that the use of *sacerdos* in 3.1 denotes a shift in tone from Horace the poet, inspired by the gods and past literature, to Horace the priest, giving advice to combat the moral degradation of the Roman citizens. By examining several key usages of *vates* and *sacerdos* in the first two books, it is possible to see connections between poetry and Augustan politics, which Horace makes explicit in the Roman Odes. Furthermore, Horace's use of additional terms in 3.1 which call to mind both prayer and poetry, like *carmina*, suggests the civic institution of Roman priesthood and echoes the religious reforms of Augustus. I argue that Horace emphasizes his role within the Augustan program through his diction, identifying himself as an authoritative literary figure and legitimizing Augustan ideology through his poetry.

In the religious valence of *sacerdos*, Horace puts himself in a position of moral authority over the general public, but by emphasizing a specific way of life for the common people Horace activates the poetic sense of *sacerdos*, calling to mind the leisurely poet of the countryside. Horace thus blends together literary and religious themes through his diction to align himself with the Augustan ideology of cultural and moral reforms. While the extent of Horace's support of the Augustan program remains a scholarly debate, Horace's self-representation as a civic authority in 3.1, backing his claims with religious and literary sentiment, is clearly marked.

Bibliography

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