

Horace's Favorite Inspiration: Sappho vs Alcaeus

Throughout his *Odes*, Horace prioritizes influence from the Greek lyric poets Sappho and Alcaeus (eg. 2.13, 1.32, 2.12, 1.1, 3.30). Scholars including Lyne, Woodman, and Clay have hypothesized that Horace took inspiration from both lyric poets and integrated their styles into his writing. Some scholars (Fraenkel 1957, Nisbet and Hubbard 1978) have hypothesized that Horace shows a significant preference for Alcaeus in *Odes 2.13*; however, I disagree with this stance. Horace's preference for Sappho's style over Alcaeus' could explain his own motivation to write about topics he personally enjoys, rather than topics that appeal to the common crowd. I argue that although Horace's *Odes 2.13* shows that he takes inspiration from both authors, he favors Sappho over Alcaeus.

Horace describes Sappho's and Alcaeus' works differently in the poem. Sappho complains about her people and girls, "Sappho puellis de popularibus / et te sonantem plenius aureo" (2.13.25-26), whereas Alcaeus writes about the hardships of sailing, exile, and war, "Alcaee, plectro dura navis, / dura fugae mala, dura belli" (2.13.27-28). Horace admits that Alcaeus' topics are more popular, but the final two stanzas take a different turn. The underworld monsters are soothed by a sweet sound, "dulci laborem decipitur sono" (2.13.38), which suggests that Sappho's music calmed the monsters. Although Clay notes this, she suggests that determining which inspiration is superior misses the point (Clay 136). My argument focuses on Horace's preference for Sappho and its effect on his topic choices.

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