

Mapping Friendship: Horace, *Sermones* 1.5

Horace's *Sermones* 1.5 depicts a perplexing journey from Rome to Brundisium that Horace purports to have taken with Maecenas, Vergil, and others. An unsolved puzzle in the poem is a mysterious town whose name, as Horace claims, does not fit into dactylic hexameter and is therefore not disclosed (1.5.87). In her comprehensive commentary, Gowers has summarized previous scholars' proposals for the town's unmetrical name, and she herself suggests Horace's birthplace, Venusia, with short e, u, and i, as an option (Gowers 2012: 208-9). On the other hand, citing a Lucilian parallel on the unmetrical name of an undisclosed slaves' festival (Lucil. 252-53W= 228-29M), Morgan argues that any attempt to locate the mysterious town on the map misses Horace's ironic play of the epic meter (Morgan 2000: 112-13). Thus most discussions on the mysterious town have focused on meter and geography.

Despite Horace's statement that *signis perfacile est* (1.5.88), few scholars seem to have considered the significance of the town's *signa*, namely nice bread and cheap water (1.5.88-89). I argue that the town's *signa* of bread and water function as Horace's hint about the overall structure of *S.1.5*, as the motifs of eating and drinking at the mysterious town correspond to an earlier episode at Forum Appi where he is unable to eat due to a diarrhoea caused by bad water (1.5.7-9). Therefore it is less important where the mysterious town is on the map (if it exists at all), and whether its name fits into dactylic hexameter or not. Rather it is the town's *signa* of bread and water and its position in the narrative of *S.1.5* that requires readers' attention. With a careful analysis of the poem, I disagree with Van Rooy's denial of any definite structure in *S.1.5* (Van Rooy 1970: 45). Instead I argue that Horace meticulously arranges all the events in *S.1.5* to render the poem in a symmetrical ring-composition, whose corresponding pairs frame and

enclose the arrival of Vergil and Horace's interaction, placing Vergil at the center of the poem (1.5.37-49).

While my paper focuses on the mysterious town and the structure of S.1.5, it does so with an eye towards what this means for *Sermones* Book 1 as a whole. Vergil is not only at the center of S.1.5 but also at the center of Horace's ten-poem *Sermones* Book 1. Zetzel and Guttman have pointed out the often overlooked symmetrical structure of Book 1: S.1.5 is the center, S.1.4 balances S.1.6; S.1.3 balances S.1.7; S.1.2 balances S.1.8, and S.1.1 balances S.1.9; moreover, this symmetry is also the structure of Vergil's *Eclogues* (Zetzel and Guttman 2009: 31-32). Therefore, I argue that Horace's *Sermones* Book 1 presents a continuous ring-composition that crosses the boundary of individual poems, frames and encloses the arrival of Vergil in S.1.5 at the center of the entire Book 1, and shows Horace's tribute and attachment to his *amicus iucundus* Vergil.

Bibliography

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