

## Reading the *Epodes* Topographically

In this paper, I will argue that Horace builds into the *Epodes* a series of interconnected topographical references to the City of Rome, specifically to the Esquiline Hill and the *Sacra Via*. I will also argue that Horace uses these topographical references to unify his collection and to develop it around a central theme.

Horace's engagement with the city is in stark contrast to the vivid and obvious ways the City of Rome is present in other Augustan poets. This difference has caused some scholars to doubt whether Horace incorporated the City of Rome into his poetry in any meaningful way. They conclude, on the basis of the paucity of direct references to specific monuments, that it is hard to locate Horace as a resident of Rome and therefore Horace must have marginalized the monuments in his poetry. Though it is true that Horace argues in numerous places for the superiority of poetry over monuments, the physical world is not absent from his poetry. Rather, the difficulty in discerning the architectural references suggests that while they are present, Horace has chosen not to foreground them. The result is poetry in which the primary focus is not directed towards, or distracted by, architectural reference. This uniquely Horatian evocation of place can be seen in the *Epodes*, where Horace appropriates the Esquiline Hill and the *Sacra Via* as a means of shaping his poetry of invective towards the larger goal of venting his anger at the death and internal decay of the Roman state due to generations of civil war.

Through continued and overlapping references to the Esquiline hill and the *Sacra Via*, Horace develops a vision of Rome as decayed at its core. The corruption that plagues the state finds expression through the images of the upstart on the *Sacra Via*, the witch amongst the Esquiline tombs, the *Sacra Via* empty of triumph and the decrepit old woman, descendant of triumphant generals, now progressing towards her Esquiline graveyard. The victory of Octavian

and the restoration of Maecenas have bought some time for those who truly care for Rome to abandon the cursed ground before continued death ensues.

I conclude by arguing that it is perhaps better to understand the bile of the *Epodes*, published probably around 30 BC, not as presenting Horace's suspicion or criticism of Octavian but as expressing his exhaustion and outrage towards the abomination of the civil wars.

Horace's attitude towards Octavian is cautiously optimistic but he is unable, so closely on the heels of Actium, to lay aside his suspicion of Rome's internal decay. However one chooses to read the references to Maecenas and Octavian, there can be no doubt that Horace appropriates the Esquiline hill and the *Sacra Via* in order to unify his collection and to develop it around a central theme.