Horácio e a sua Perenidade

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IMPRENSA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE COIMBRA
COIMBRA UNIVERSITY PRESS
ANNABLUME

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When Horace published the first three books of his Odes, very probably in the year 23 B.C., when he was 42 years of age, a rather younger Propertius – perhaps 20 years Horace’s junior – had recently brought forth the first book, or Monobiblos, of his elegies (dated to 25 B.C.), with two more books to follow in the subsequent two years (at least on a widely accepted dating). The fourth book of Horace’s Odes was published a decade later than the first three, in 13 B.C., when Horace was now in his fifties; so too, the fourth book of Propertius’ elegies appeared some time after 16 B.C. By way of comparison, Tibullus is thought to have published the first book of his elegies not long after 27 B.C., the presumed date of the triumph by Messalla celebrated in 1.7; the year 25 B.C. is a likely date. However, Peter E. Knox has recently argued that 1.7 better suits the year 29 B.C., and if publication of Book I followed soon after, then the usually assumed priority of Propertius in regard to Tibullus would have to be reversed. The date of publication of the second book is not known, but since Tibullus probably died in 19 B.C., it will have preceded Horace’s fourth book by several years. Ovid too may have been producing poetry around this time: J.C. McKeown has argued that the earliest version of the Amores might have been performed in the mid-20s B.C., and published initially in 22 or 21 B.C., with the second edition, now reduced from five books to three, appearing sometime between 12 and 7 B.C. Thus, when Horace was composing his amatory poetry, which represents numerically something over a fifth of the total number of odes, a fairly well-defined body of love poetry, sufficiently coherent, despite internal differences, to deserve the name of genre, was in circulation, and could serve as a point of contrast with Horace’s lyrics.

It is sometimes overlooked, however, that there was also another corpus of erotic poetry circulating in Rome at this time, namely epigrams, written chiefly, it would appear, in Greek but sometimes by writers who were fluent in Latin or

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1 This paper began as a joint contribution by myself and Regina Höschele, and much of the argument concerning Marcus Argentarius derives from a study that she and I have been preparing together. It is presented here with her kind permission, and in turn I dedicate this essay to Regina.


3 However, a date as late as 16 has been suggested: for arguments, see Harry C. Schnur, “When Did Tibullus Die?”, Classical Journal 56 (1961) 227-229.


5 See the contribution by Paolo Fedeli in this volume, who notes how the young Horace “aveva contrapposto alle loro [sc. the elegiac poets’] patetiche effusioni sentimentali un atteggiamento di serena compostezza e d’imperturbabilità nei confronti dei contrasti d’amore.”