HORACE AND ANACREON

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When Horace spoke of his indebtedness to Greek lyric poetry, it was Aeolic poetry that he mentioned, the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus: he plays the lyre of Lesbos (Carm. 1.1.34), he strikes it with the plectrum of Lesbos (1.26.11), he was the first to bring Aeolic song to Italy (3.30.13); and it was Alcaeus rather than Sappho who was his model: Carm. 1.32.3ff. and Epist. 2.2.99ff. show this, and we can point to at least six poems which unmistakably show Alcaeus' influence, but to hardly any which certainly show indebtedness to Sappho.²

What of Anacreon, the third great Greek writer of solo song? He mentions him first in the 14th Epode: 'I'm in love', he tells Maecenas, 'and that is why I have not completed my book of iambics; and my love equals that of Anacreon for Bathyllus in its burning intensity':

non aliter Sarnio dicunt arsisse Bathyllo
Anacreonta Teium,
qui persaepe cava testudine flevit amorem
non elaboratum ad pedem (9–12).

So Horace, even in the early days when he was composing epodes in the manner of Archilochus, introduces Anacreon as the poet of passionate love-songs. The reference to his simple metre, 'non elaboratum ad pedem', is of interest: Anacreon's lines are usually repeated ionic lines (the so-called anacreontics) or groups of the short glyconics rounded off by the even shorter pherecratean.³ He rarely uses a pattern as complex as an alcaic or even a sapphic stanza, and his 'unelaborate' metres fit his frivolous subjects. Horace never used only the short glyconics and pherecrateans as Catullus occasionally did, preferring to mix them with longer asclepiads. On the one occasion when he used ionic lines (Carm. 3.12 'Miserarum est'), he produced what is possibly the least successful of all his 103 odes.⁴

In Book 1 no. 17 of his Odes, Horace invites a girl, Tyndaris, to join him in the country:

hic in reducta valle Caniculae
vitabis aestus et fide Teia
dices laborantis in uno
Penelopen vitreamque Circean.

Mythological themes are hard to find in Anacreon, and the lyre of Teos must be chosen as being suited not to myth but to love poetry of any kind. Nisbet and Hubbard observe that Horace contrasts his gentle behaviour with that of the rough boy-friend Cyrus whom Tyndaris will leave behind in town, and note
helpfully that the Athenian poet Critias (8.1f.) called Anacreon ἄλπος: he too was a poet who caused pain to no-one. Nisbet and Hubbard continue, 'The pastoral note of the Anacreontea is even more relevant to our poem'; but we must be cautious here, since not one of the Anacreontea can be shown to be earlier than Horace, although some might be, for all we know.

Anacreon is mentioned, for the third and last time, in the ninth ode of Book 4: Horace is claiming that his lyric poetry will never die: Homer may hold first place, but Pindar, Simonides, Alcaeus, Stesichorus, Anacreon and Sappho still live. Anacreon shares a stanza with the other singer of love, Sappho, for whom Horace has the warmest praise. The content of his poetry is characterized by the verb 'lusit':

\[ \text{nec, si quid olim lusit Anacreon,} \]
\[ \text{delevit aetas (9–10).} \]

Horace has the love-poetry in mind again, no doubt, although other light-hearted poems are not excluded.

In none of these allusions does Horace speak of Anacreon with the sentimentality we find in the Greek Anthology and the Anacreontea, where Anacreon appears as an old man, dripping with perfume, drenched with wine, tottering under the influence of Dionysus, one shoe off and one shoe on— but still turning lascivious eyes on the boys and girls alike. Horace mentions him only for the high quality and intensity of his love poetry.

A few of the odes use motifs of Anacreon. In 1.23 Horace has

\[ \text{Vitas inuleo me similis, Chloe,} \]
\[ \text{quaerenti pavidam montibus aviis} \]
\[ \text{matrem non sine vano} \]
\[ \text{aurarum et siluae metu...} \]
\[ \text{atqui non ego te tigris ut aspera} \]
\[ \text{Gaetulusve leo frangere persequor:} \]
\[ \text{tandem desine matrem} \]
\[ \text{tempestiva sequi viro.} \]

Aelian quotes three lines of Anacreon (PMG 408) that must have influenced Horace: unfortunately his interest in the poem was purely zoological—does a female deer really have horns?—and he did not give us even a complete sentence: only the adverb ἄγαναικ, 'gently', and a simile set in the accusative case: 'like a newborn sucking fawn, who is frightened, left in the woods away from his horned mother.' Perhaps the missing words are 'I approach you'—gently, as I would approach a fawn. Horace's poem is different in important ways: the metre is aeolic, not ionic; the syntax is different: Horace begins with his second person verb 'vitas', and so there is no 'motto', and of course Horace's word-order is complex as so often: 'you avoid—fawn—me—like'. Yet the verdict of Nisbet and Hubbard is perfectly correct: Horace's poem 'is tender, humorous, and discreetly sensuous; these are the qualities of Anacreon.'
They are thinking above all of Anacreon’s delicious πόλε Θρηκτή (417), the Thracian filly who runs from the poet, since she does not have a skilled rider to mount her: ‘as it is, you graze the meadows and play, skipping lightly.’ Horace must have had Anacreon’s poem in mind when he composed Ode 2.5, but the result is far from happy: ‘She is not yet strong enough to bear the yoke on submissive neck, to keep up with the duties of a mate, to stand the weight of the bull when he falls on her to make love. The thoughts of your heifer are among the green plains; now she allays the oppressive heat in the river, now she longs to play with the calves in the damp willow grove. Put away your desire for the unripe grape. . . .’ This is clumsy compared with Anacreon, clumsy compared for that matter with Horace at his best. I recall a paper given a few years ago by Professor Combellack of the University of Oregon, the gist of which was that the Greeks did not find cows ridiculous: bovine was beautiful. But to my mind Horace’s alteration from filly to heifer is no improvement, and the grace and wit and metrical rightness of the Greek poem are lost. Nisbet and Hubbard do well to liken Horace with the bull in the china-shop. Their lamented colleague, Colin Macleod, in his essay on the poem also speaks of its near-crudity, but finds that the crudity represents appropriately and coolly the urgency of masculine lust. On this occasion he fails to convince me. Horace in fact used Anacreon’s image more closely and (I should say) more successfully in another poem, Odes 3.11: speaking of the young girl Lyde he says, ‘Like a three-year-old filly on the wide plains she plays leaping about and fears to be touched, unwed and still unripe for an eager husband.’

On only one occasion does the commentator Porphyrio note the influence of Anacreon on Horace; but there may be no significance in this, since he misses even loud clear echoes of Greek poetry like ‘nunc est bibendum’. Of Odes 1.27 he says, ‘The sense is taken from Anacreon’, but he must be referring only to the first two stanzas, since the third veers off disconcertingly in Horace’s manner. Anacreon cries (356b), ‘Let’s have no more Scythian-style drinking with clatter and shouting but perform beautiful hymns while we drink.’ Horace begins, ‘To fight with winecups is Thracian; away with such barbarity; keep chaste Bacchus from bloody quarrels. The Median scimitar is far out of keeping with wine and lamps. Quiet your impious shouts, my companions, and keep your weight on your elbow.’ The echo is not only in the words ‘Thracum’ and ‘barbarum’ but in ‘verecundum’ and ‘impium’, which recall the καλοὶ ἔμνοι of Anacreon. We know also that Anacreon used the word ἀκινθίας ‘scimitar’ (fr. 465), although it was probably not in this drinking poem. In this instance too Horace avoids Anacreon’s metre, and once again there is no question of a ‘motto’: Horace’s first line is far from Anacreon’s directness and simplicity.

One sometimes reads that when Horace spoke of leaving his shield ingloriously on the battlefield of Philippi (Carm. 2.7) he was reminding his listeners of similar behaviour on the part of Archilochus, Alcaeus and Anacreon. But the correct reading in the relevant quotation from Anacreon (381b) is quite uncertain: we have no context to help us: the line is quoted for its metre only; the form of the
verb ὑπτώ may be the participle ὑπαξ, as in Bergk’s emendation, or one of the two ms. readings, the aorist ὑπτ', which may be first or third person, or the second person ὑπεξ. That Anacreon was speaking of himself is far from certain. There may indeed have been a satirical element in Anacreon’s line—he was not ἀλης all the time—and I should like to finish by glancing at Anacreon’s satirical writing. The best-known example is the poem (388) on Artemon, once poverty-stricken, now enjoying a life of luxury: I think it possible that Horace had him in mind when he composed the 4th Epode on the upstart military tribune: Artemon often suffered the stocks, the wheel and the scourge; Horace’s tribune carries the marks of the rope on his sides and of the shackles on his legs which were scourged by order of the triumvir; Artemon now rides in a women’s carriage, the tribune in a pony-trap; Artemon is bejewelled and has an ivory parasol, the tribune’s toga is three metres wide.

Anacreon in fact wrote poems in epodic metre, and in one (432) makes a woman complain to a man who has, she claims, made her wrinkled and over-ripe by his lust. In the second part of Horace’s twelfth Epode an old woman complains that Horace is lacking in lust: sexual abuse from an old lady, even though from a different standpoint. Certainly it is Archilochus, not Anacreon, whom Horace claims to have followed in the epodes: ‘numeros animosque secutus / Archilochi’ (Epist. 1.19.24f.); but the parallels with Anacreon may be significant. There is more satirical writing in Anacreon than is usually recognised: he is not merely the elegant poet of love and wine. In addition to the Artemon piece we have the fragment of a poem (424) directed, we are told, at an effeminate who in the marriage chamber οὐκ ἐγημὲν ἄλλ’ ἐγήματο; there is noisy Gastrodore, swilling her wine (427): Gastrodore can hardly be her real name; there is the old man who anoints his breast with perfume although it is hollower than the pipes of Pan (363); there is the δρίγυμον γυναίκα of the papyrus fragment (347), ‘the easily-recognised lady’ who may be a well-known courtesan left nameless; and there is ‘bald Alexis’ who once again goes a-wooing (394). The satirical element in Anacreon may not have been extensive, since he is so commonly referred to as the poet of love and wine; but he did write satiric poetry, and it may well have influenced the young Horace of the Epodes.

NOTES

1. This article is based on part of a paper, ‘Horace and the Greek Monodists’, read to the Classical Association of South Africa in January, 1985.
3. For Anacreon’s metres see B. Gentili, Anacreon, Rome 1958, 109–111.
4. If he found Anacreon’s metres too unelaborate for him, Pindar’s were beyond him as being too complex: ‘numerisque fertur /lege solutis’ (Carm. 4.2.11).
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