

# LESBIANTIQUITY

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**HORACE**  
**HORATIUS**

**THE MASCULINE  
WITCH & POETESS**

LESBIANTIQUITY © Georgina Barker (Portknockie: Sapphizdat, 2024)

Horatius translation, introduction, and notes © Georgina Barker 2024

*Epode 5* text from: Niall Rudd, ed., *Horace: Odes and Epodes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) (itself based on the Oxford Text of E.C. Wickham, revised by H.W. Garrod, Oxford 1912)

*Epistle 1* text from: H. Rushton Fairclough, ed., *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (London: W. Heinemann, 1926)

Back cover art: 'Root & Branch Tree' © Emily Setzer 2024

## THE TRANSLATOR

### Dr Georgina Barker

I am the inventor of the Root & Branch translation method, which I developed to highlight the queerness of selected classical texts, drawing on my experience as a translator from Russian. I am the author of *SPQR in the USSR: Elena Shvarts's Classical Antiquity*, and the compiler and director of the verbatim play *Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World*. I am currently researching receptions of Greek and Roman 'lesbianism' by Russian lesbians and bisexual women. I live in Scotland with my wife and my parrot.



## QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS

Horatius (known in English as Horace) was born in 65 BC in Venusia (modern-day Venosa) as the son of a freedman.<sup>1</sup> He participated in the Civil Wars, fighting on the side of Brutus against Octavian (Augustus), but after the conclusive defeat of the Republican cause Horatius was able nevertheless to prosper in Augustus's new Empire, thanks to his poetic gifts, gaining the patronage of the richest man in Rome, Maecenas, and later of Augustus himself. He published in a staggering variety of poetic genres and metres, spanning themes from invective, through love, to philosophy, with both personal and national significance. Horatius died in 8 BC in Rome.<sup>2</sup>

Horatius's references to lesbianism are oblique and fleeting – just two brief instances, both characterised by the single ambiguous word 'masculine'.

The first is in *Epodes* 5 (an epode being an iambic poem in alternating long and short lines), which was probably written in 36 BC.<sup>3</sup> Horatius uses the slur 'masculine-lusted/libidoed' against a witch named Folia. She appears just briefly, as one of three witches assisting chief witch Canidia in her attempts to make a love charm through various magics, including the gruesome murder of a young boy.

The second is a single line in *Epistles* 1.19 (a letter in verse), which was written around 20 BC.<sup>4</sup> Horatius writes to Maecenas to defend himself against accusations of merely imitating Greek poets; in fact, Horatius says, he was an innovator for bringing Greek metres into Latin, including those of Sappho. He praises Sappho and her poetry as being 'masculine' – a double-edged compliment.

<sup>1</sup> Rudd (2004) p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Rudd (2004) p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rudd (2004) p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Mayer (1994) p. 265.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Mayer, Roland, ed., *Horace: Epistles. Book I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

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## ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore  
a variety of options for the text:  
any variants in the original < Greek Latin > texts  
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words  
of the original text, replicating when possible  
word order, root meanings of words, and  
grammatical gender (  $\begin{pmatrix} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{pmatrix}$  ) of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

## EPODE 5.41-46

41 not absent was masculine- < lusted  
libidoed >

< Riminian  
Ariminuman > Folia -

so both < leisured  
idle > Naples  
< Neapolis > believed

and every neighbouring town -

45 she who with Thessalian voice the < enchanted  
sung-forth > constellations

and moon from the sky rips down.



41 non defuisse masculae libinis

Ariminensem Foliam

et otiosa creditit Neapolis

et omne vicinum oppidum,

45 quae sidera excantata voce Thessala

lunamque caelo deripit.

## NOTES

41 *masculae libidinis*; *masculine-lusted/libidoed*: i.e., like a man Folia prefers women for sex.

42 *Riminian/Ariminuman*: Horatius adds exoticism by making Folia an 'out-of-town witch', from Ariminum on the north-east coast of Italy (modern-day Rimini). Ariminum's only supernatural association was the magic herb *reseda*, which grew nearby (Watson 2003 p. 218).

42 *Folia*: a real Roman name; it means 'Leaves'. It could have associations with the aromatic ointment *folium nardi* (nard salve), produced in Naples; or the Greek word *folis*, a reptile's scale (Watson 2003 p. 218).

43-4 Although *Epode 5* is set in Rome and Folia is from Ariminum, apparently she is most famous in the Neapolitan area. The towns on the Bay of Naples were pleasure resorts, so – Horatius implies – had spare time for gossiping. Naples was near to Lake Avernus, where necromantic rites took place (Watson 2003 pp. 217, 219).

45 *Thessalian voice*: the witches of Thessaly were famed throughout the classical world.

46 Horatius credits Folia with very run-of-the-mill powers: witches in classical writings are always singing the moon down from the sky.

## EPISTLE 1.19.28

( regulates  
moderates  
tempers ) the muse with Archilochus's foot } - masculine Sappho  
Archilochus's muse with her foot }



temperat Archilochi musam pede mascula Sappho

## NOTES

- Two interpretations of this line are grammatically and sensically possible, and it seems likely that Horace intended both to be read.

- *Archilochus*: the seventh-century BC Greek lyric poet was widely considered to be 'the father of all lyric' because of the variety of metres he used, which were then imitated and developed by his successors, Sappho among them (Fairclough 1926 p. xii).

- *foot*: Horatius puns on the dual meaning of *pes* – 'foot', both as in the end of a leg, and as in the basic unit of a poetic line. Here, in discussing poetry, the meaning 'poetic foot' is foremost, but the meaning 'leg foot' is still present. In conjunction with the anthropomorphisation of poetry as a woman (the muse), a picture forms of a rather dominatrix-like Sappho.

- *mascula*; *masculine*: this epithet primarily refers to Sappho's excellence in the male domain of poetry, which Horatius makes clear by his mention of Archilochus. However, a secondary meaning must also be intended: Horatius is implying that Sappho is also *mascula* in her sexual preferences – as when he used the same word about the witch Folia in *Epode* 5.



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