

*Satis Divinatio: Divination in Virgil's Eclogues and Horace's Satires I*

Divination was quite common in the Roman world and was often used in religious and political events. Therefore, it is no surprise that the works of Augustan poets frequently mention or reference divination. While many scholars have discussed the mentioning of divinatory practices in Augustan literature (see Dicks 1963, Riess 1933), few have focused on how the portrayal of divination is shaped by whether the practice is perceived as being Roman or foreign. Although many Augustan works incorporate mentions of divination, this paper will examine the use of divination in Virgil's *Eclogues* and Horace's *Satires I*.

The Roman government employed three types of divination experts: the augurs, who interpreted signs from watching birds, priests who were in charge of the Sibylline books, and haruspices, who read the entrails of sacrificial animals (Linderski 2016). However, not all types of divination were utilized by the Roman state and other foreign divinatory practices, such as astrology, did not have the same prestige as traditionally Roman divination. This tension between traditionally Roman and foreign divinatory practices can clearly be seen in Virgil's *Eclogues* and Horace's *Satires I*. While both poets include divinatory practices in their works, the depiction and the effect of divination in each contrasts starkly.

In the *Eclogues*, divination is mentioned several times and is grounded in pastoral life. Portents warn farmers in *Eclogue 1* (*Eclogue 1.16-7*) and 9 (*Eclogue 9.14-6*), the Cumaean prophecy is at the center of *Eclogue 4* (*Eclogue 4.1-7*), and the star of Caesar is hailed in *Eclogue 9* (*Eclogue 9.46-49*). Virgil focuses on traditionally Roman divinatory practices, connecting the avian portent in *Eclogue 9* with the practice of augury and the Cumaean prophecy in *Eclogue 4* with the use of the Sibylline Books by the Roman state. In addition, Virgil also

connects these instances of divination to contemporary political events, such as the reference to Caesar's comet. Divination in the *Eclogues* is shown as an important function not only of Roman pastoral life but also of Roman politics.

On first glance, Horace appears to reject the Virgilian model of divination in his first *Satires*. While Horace's relationship with divination is complicated and varies throughout his works (see Riess 1933; Dicks 1963), this paper will only focus on the depiction of divination in *Satires* 1. Not only is divination mentioned infrequently (especially compared to his other works like the *Odes*) but when divination is mentioned, it is distinctively shown as foreign and used as a joke. Virgil's natural portents are replaced with a Horatian tourist trap (*Satires* 1.5.97-101). Virgil's Sibyl is replaced with the Sabine *anus* (*Satire* 1.9.29-34) and witches (*Satire* 1.8.23-29) in Horace. Caesar's comet in Virgil is replaced with the Dog Star in Horace (*Satire* 1.7.22-6). While this difference in portrayal could be put down to the difference in genre, on closer inspection Horace is not deriding divination as a whole: rather, Horace only lampoons divination that takes place outside of traditional Roman practices. Just as Horace's father steers him away from vice in *Satire* 1.4 by pointing out examples of bad behavior (*Satires* 1.4.105-6), Horace steers readers away from foreign and unsanctioned divinatory practices by ridiculing them in his satire.

Virgil's *Eclogues* and Horace's *Satires I* thus offer two different models to show the role and authority of divination in Rome. Virgil's traditionally Roman divination in the *Eclogues* produces significant predictions grounded in pastoral life and Roman politics. On the other hand, the foreign divination in Horace's *Satires* fails to produce anything but laughter and are used as negative examples of what not to do: these types of divination have no place in Rome. What appears to be different opinions on divination are actually two different models promoting the

same thing: the preservation of traditionally Roman practices. Read together, the positive portrayal of Roman practices in the *Eclogues* and the negative portrayal of foreign practices in the *Satires* reflect the desire to preserve Roman traditions of divination (and protect it from outside influences) during the turbulence of the thirties.

#### Bibliography of Works Cited

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