SOCRATES' HOUSE: A NOTE ON HORACE, *ODES* 1.29

Odes (= *Carm.*) 1.29, while perhaps 'not an important poem' (so Commager), is a jocular address to Horace's philosophically inclined friend Iccius, who is considering joining a military expedition to Arabia; the poet remonstrates playfully with him about seeking wealth while leaving behind his philosophical studies.[1] It ends as follows (vv. 10–16):

quis neget arduis
pronos relabi posse riuos
montibus et Tiberim reuerti

cum tu coemptos undique nobilis
libros Panaeti Socraticam et domum
mutare loricis Hiberis,
pollicitus meliora, tendis?

Who could deny that descending streams can flow back up steep mountains and that the Tiber can turn back, when *you* have a mind to exchange noble Panaetius' books, which you bought up wherever you could find them, and your Socratic house for Spanish mail, though you promised better?

The commentators, from Pseudo-Acro and Porphyrio onwards, are largely agreed in understanding *Socraticam domum* as 'a school of philosophy': Iccius leaves behind both his books and his discussion group when he goes off to serve.[2] Others understand it to mean 'books by Socratics'.[3] These are possible, of course, as the parallels show, but a little strange: there never was a school of Socratics dedicated to his philosophy (though many schools claimed intellectual descent from him), so both of the words in the phrase must be taken metaphorically: 'Socratic', that is, philosophical generally, and 'home', that is, school.[4]

I think there is an easier understanding. I suggest that Horace refers to a widespread belief about Socrates' home-life, which finds expression in a variety of places, namely that it was quite lowly or ascetic. First, there is an anecdote in which Socrates tells his

[1] R.J. Goar, 'Horace and the betrayal of philosophy: *Odes* 1.29', *CJ* 68 (1973), 116–18 takes it as 'hard-hitting' with 'indignant questions'.

[2] The ancient commentators may mean 'Socratic school', which is historically mistaken; see n. 4 below. For the meaning 'school', see P.H. Peerlkamp, *Q. Horatii Flacci* Carmina (Amsterdam, 1862[2]), 93, J.G. Orelli, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* (Berlin, 1886[4]), 170, R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace* Odes *Book I* (Oxford, 1970), 342, H.P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz: Eine Interpretation der Oden* (Darmstadt, 2001[3]), 1.267 n. 1 and R. Mayer, *Horace* Odes *Book 1* (Cambridge, 2012), 191; all of them take it to mean 'school of philosophy (generally)' *uel sim*. H. Schütz, *Q. Horatius Flaccus:* Oden *und* Epoden (Berlin, 1889[3]), 106 takes it to mean '*secta*, διδασκαλία', then 'Philosophie überhaupt'. P. Connor, *Horace's Lyric Poetry: The Force of Humour* (Berwick, 1987), 152 translates as 'Socratic house', but does not comment on the precise meaning, and G. Friedrich, *Q. Horatius Flaccus: Philologische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig, 1894), 156 argues for 'philosophical', i.e. simple 'house', and compares Cic. *QFr.* 3.1.5, esp. *uilla ... philosopha*; this is on the right track, but does not give full force to the choice of *Socraticam*.

[3] So F. Ritter, *Horatii* Carmina *et* Epodi (Leipzig, 1856), 111, A. Kießling and R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus:* Oden *und* Epoden (Berlin, 1908[5]), 143 and T.E. Page, *Q. Horatii Flacci* Carminum Libri IV, Epodon Liber (London, 1959), 201.

[4] On the non-existence of any 'Socratic School' in the sense of 'a group of philosophers dedicated to Socrates' own viewpoints', see W.K.C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge, 1971), 165–87, esp. 165–6.

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wife Xanthippe not to bother with elaborate preparations, because, if they are good people, the quality of the table settings will not matter to them, and if they are bad people, they should not be associated with anyway and the offense is irrelevant. The anecdote is found complete in Diogenes Laertius (2.34), but was also recounted in the lost eighth book of Aulus Gellius (*cap*. 11), and was found on a papyrus, *P.Hibeh* 182, dated to the second half of the third century B.C.E. (which I recently re-edited with commentary as *FGrHist* IV 1133). The papyrus shows that the anecdote had some currency early in the Hellenistic period, and its appearance in Diogenes and Gellius shows wide diffusion; Horace could easily have known it. Here is Diogenes' version (2.34):

καλέσας ἐπὶ δεῖπνον πλουσίους καὶ τῆς Ξανθίππης αἰδουμένης ἔφη, 'θάρρει· εἰ μὲν γὰρ εἶεν μέτριοι, συμπεριενεχθεῖεν ἄν· εἰ δὲ φαῦλοι, ἡμῖν αὐτῶν οὐδὲν μελήσει.'

Socrates invited some rich men to dinner and, when Xanthippe was ashamed, he said, 'take heart, for if they turn out to be reasonable, they'll manage, but if they're base, they won't be any concern of ours.'

The version in *P.Hibeh* 182, on the whole very similar, refers to the invitees simply as 'guests' (ξένοι), but makes clear that Xanthippe is concerned that their usual table settings are inappropriate for company and that the company is already there. The point of the *chreia* is that philosophically minded sorts should not be concerned about luxury, and that the conventional opinions of normal people are of no concern to philosophers. Socrates is portrayed as inflicting his famous indifference to social norms on others as a test of their progress in philosophy. It is a test that, Horace suggests, Iccius would currently fail, just as, we gather, most people did not live up to Socrates' demanding standards.

Another anecdote on similar lines was originally preserved at Aulus Gellius (*NA* 8.11), now lost except the *titulus*, which reads *quam festiue responderit Xanthippae uxori Socrates petenti, ut per Dionysia largiore sumptu cenitarent* ('how wittily Socrates responded to his wife Xanthippe when she asked to dine at greater expense for the Dionysia'). The implication is that Socrates and Xanthippe usually did not spend very much on food, another sign of the asceticism of their home-life.[5]

Socrates' small, and implicitly poorly furnished or ascetic house, appears again in Phaedrus (3.9):

> uulgare amici nomen, sed rara est fides.
> cum paruas aedes sibi fundasset Socrates,
> (cuius non fugio mortem, si famam assequar,
> et cedo inuidiae, dummodo absoluar cinis)
> ex populo sic nescioquis, ut fieri solet:
> 'quaeso, tam angustam talis uir ponis domum?'
> 'utinam' inquit 'ueris hanc amicis impleam!'
>
> The title 'friend' is cheap, but [*sc*. a true friend's] trustworthiness is rare.
> When Socrates had made himself the foundation for a little house
> (and I do not flee his death, if I should achieve his fame,
> and I yield to the envy against him, provided my ashes are acquitted)
> someone from the crowd asks, as happens,

[5] A related anecdote, mentioning Xanthippe going out for the Dionysia (probably 'to see the procession' rather than 'to see the plays'), is found in *P.Hibeh* 182 after the anecdote previously discussed.

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> 'What's this? You, such a great man, are building such a small house?'
> Socrates replies 'I only wish I could fill it with real friends!'

The point of the anecdote is very similar: Socrates only needs a small house because the number of true friends (*ueri amici*) is so small. The bar is set high and few can cross it. The house, then, is not luxurious, but it is filled with good things.

Horace's phrase, then, means 'your Socratic home', with 'Socratic' understood to mean 'ascetic, like Socrates' was' and home taken literally. There may also be an additional implication that the Socratic home (read 'Iccius' current lifestyle') is ethically good and, though he perhaps does not have many friends, those he has are good (a regular concern of Horace's); military service, by implication, is to be avoided, especially because Iccius' motives are questionable. In line 14 we have a merism for Iccius' life, studies (*libros Panaeti*) and home life (*Socraticam ... domum*), whose terms correspond to Horace's joking in the earlier part of the poem: Iccius is to adopt a new lifestyle (*acrem militiam*, 2) complete with captive concubine (*quae ... uirginum ... barbara*, 5–6) and a cup-bearer, reminiscent of Ganymede, who was captured in an oriental court (*puer quis ex aula ...*, 7), instead of his previous *Socratica domus*. Horace plays on the standard pair *militiae* and *domi* by using each with its literal meaning. Iccius will also live in great wealth and luxury (*beatis ... gazis*, 1–2, and note the boy's *capillis ... unctis*, 7–8) instead of spending his money on (lots of? hard-to-find?) philosophical texts (*coemptos undique*, 13). Horace professes to be shocked at Iccius' proposed abandonment of his ascetic philosophical lifestyle—austere, bookish, ethically rigorous, perhaps semi-solitary—in favour of freebooting military adventures and riches.[6]

But this too is ironic: in *Epist*. 1.12, also addressed to Iccius, Horace again teases him about lust for money running headlong into his philosophical studies—Democritus, Empedocles, and … Stertinius, a contemporary Stoic ('Mr Snorer'), are mentioned.[7] So his *domus* was probably not as *Socratica* as Horace pretended in *Carm*. 1.29, and his philosophical study, while tending towards Stoicism, was not terribly effective at reining in his desires.

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[6] Even if the relevance of this particular anecdote is denied, I still hold that the phrase *Socraticam domum* should be understood as a reference to Socrates' rather ascetic lifestyle, which was commonly thought appropriate to philosophers generally, rather than to a school of philosophers. Another mismatch between Stoic philosophical pretensions and actual lifestyle can be found at *Epode* 8.

[7] The *gens Stertinia* was ancient, but this Stertinius, a Stoic philosopher, is unknown outside of Horace. Pseudo-Acro, in his note on the passage in *Epistles* 1, reports a huge philosophical production (220 volumes), not a trace of which is left anywhere. See F. Muecke, *Horace* Satires *Book II* (Warminster, 1993), on *Sat.* 2.3.33.

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