SPARTAN TARENTUM? RESISTING DECLINE IN *ODES* 3.5[1]

Horace, *Odes* 3.5 is an unusually time-conscious piece. The soldier of Crassus 'grown old' in the service of the enemy (8), the (implicitly) ancient *ancilia* (10) and 'eternal Vesta' (11), and Regulus' 'foresighted mind' (13) and fears for 'time to come' (16) all underscore the lapse of time as a major concern of the poem. But the clearest way that time is thematized in 3.5 is in its preoccupation with the power of precedent. Regulus, stubbornly resisting any temptation to do the Carthaginians' bidding, clearly functions as a good *exemplum* from the past for Horace's contemporaries, an *exemplum* that the *miles Crassi*, gone native in Parthia, would have done well to bear in mind. But the issue of exemplarity goes deeper than that in this poem. In Regulus, Horace presents not only a positive *exemplum* but also an instance of a praiseworthy attitude towards *exempla.* Regulus appreciates the value of setting a good precedent. It is explicitly the fear of setting a poor example that motivates his heroic stand before the senate:

> hoc cauerat mens prouida Reguli
> dissentientis condicionibus
> foedis et exemplo trahentis
> perniciem ueniens in aeuum,
>
> si non periret immiserabilis
> captiua pubes. (13–18)

It was this that the foresighted mind of Regulus had taken precautions against, opposing the shameful terms and deducing disaster for time to come from the precedent if the captive youth did not die without pity.

The key word *exemplo* sits appropriately at the most emphatic moment of Horace's version of the Alcaic stanza, the drag of three long, uninterrupted syllables in the third line which replaces the two longs plus caesura the reader is trained to expect from the first two.[2] Regulus' speech to the Senate opposing a ransom for himself and his soldiers involves a narrower application of this same principle, the importance of sound precedents. Once having surrendered and been ransomed, a soldier will never fight bravely again: *auro repensus scilicet acrior/miles redibit* (25–6). That is, established standards must be maintained, according to Regulus, and any falling off from those standards is irredeemable.

If Regulus both respects and represents a good example, the *miles Crassi* is his antithesis. A model of how *not* to act, he displays his depravity above all in his neglect of the historical survivals that constitute Rome's essence. The crucial word here is *oblitus* at 11. The turncoat soldier is oblivious to the past, forgetful even of the unforgettable. In the exquisite formulation . . . *oblitus aeternaeque Vestae*, an oxymoron, *oblitus aeternae*, combines with a fine exploitation of the 'Alcaic effect'[3] to

[1] An abridged version of this argument appeared in *Ad Familiares*, the journal of the Friends of Classics, vol. 21 (October 2001), and I gained encouragement to develop and rebrand it from some generous remarks on that version by David West. Gregory Hutchinson also contributed some extremely helpful comments.

[2] See D. West, *Horace Odes II: Vatis Amici* (Oxford, 1998), xx, on this 'Alcaic effect': 'the sense is often intensified by the drag of the third lines and the acceleration of the fourth'; and J. Henderson, *Fighting for Rome: Poets and Caesars, History and Civil War* (Cambridge, 1998), 160–2, for an attempt to capture the effect typographically. The 'acceleration of the fourth' line in 16, *perniciem ueniens in aeuum*, suggests equally effectively the headlong decline that would ensue from the precedent that Regulus is determined should not be set.

[3] See n. 2.

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communicate the soldier's utter perversity: how can one *forget* what is *everlasting*, particularly when 'everlasting', *aeternae*, is stretched out across those three long, *uninterrupted* syllables?[4] In losing contact with the past and its guidance, of course, the soldier has lost contact with his Roman identity altogether, his *toga* and his *nomen* as well as the *ancilia*, emblems of Rome's divinely sanctioned existence,[5] and Vesta, the very embodiment of Rome and its continuity. To be truly Roman and to be respectful of what has gone before, according to the Regulus Ode, are synonymous.

The end of the Regulus Ode is one of the most celebrated moments in Latin literature, and its effect has been much discussed.[6] The last stanza in particular offers an emotional diminuendo, typical of closing passages, and at the same time intensifies our sense of the horrors awaiting Regulus (and his philosophical impassivity in the face of them) by the sheer contrast between Horace's placid closing scene and a Carthaginian torture chamber:[7]

> atqui sciebat quae sibi barbarus
> tortor pararet; non aliter tamen
> dimouit obstantis propinquos
> et populum reditus morantem
>
> quam si clientum longa negotia
> diiudicata lite relinqueret,
> tendens Venafranos in agros
> aut Lacedaemonium Tarentum. (49–56)

And yet he knew what the barbarian torturer had in store for him; but nonetheless parted the kinsmen who blocked his way and the Roman people delaying his return, as though he was leaving behind a long lawsuit on behalf of his dependants, when judgement had been given, heading off for the Venafran fields or Spartan Tarentum.

Nobody disputes the brilliance of the end of the Regulus Ode, in any case. But equally nobody, I venture, has fully understood it, because nobody has given proper weight to the *very* end. In the last two words, *Lacedaemonium Tarentum*, the central thesis of the poem (as I have attempted to define it)—the necessity of respecting and imitating the past—is unexpectedly, and all the more powerfully, restated.

The epithet 'Spartan' for the city of Tarentum is prima facie a picturesque detail appropriate to a holiday resort: its justification lies in the story, for which Strabo cites Ephorus (*Geog.* 6.3.3 = Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 216), that Tarentum was founded by a Spartan faction called the Partheniae, led by Phalanthus (cf. Hor. *Carm.* 2.6.11). But Horatian lyric is intolerant of redundancy, and the adjective is

[4] As Gregory Hutchinson has pointed out to me, the natural acceleration into the fourth line of the stanza is countered in line 12 by the weighty meaning of *Ioue* and the elision between that word and the following.

[5] Livy 5.54.7, cited by D. West, *Horace Odes III: Dulce Periculum* (Oxford, 2002), 57.

[6] A representative sample of commentators: for the quiet ending ('Dieses ruhige, innerliche Ende der Ode. . .'), H. P. Syndikus, *Die Lyrik des Horaz: eine Interpretation der Oden* 2 (Darmstadt, 1973), 85; for its simultaneously softening and intensifying effect, S. Commager, *The Odes of Horace: A Critical Study* (New Haven, 1962), 112: on the one hand 'Regulus' splendid act fades into a crepuscular familiarity', but on the other Regulus' journey works as an oblique analogy for his death: 'for Regulus the *longa negotia* of life are in fact finished, and. . .he is truly returning to his final home'. S. J. Harrison, 'Philosophical imagery in Horace, *Odes* 3.5', *CQ* 36 (1986), 502–7, at 504–7, pursues the hint of philosophical colouring in Regulus' departure from the everyday realm.

[7] The tortures that Horace so effectively leaves to our imagination are spelled out by Cicero at *Pis.* 43: *ille M. Regulus quem Carthaginienses resectis palpebris inligatum in machina uigilando necauerunt.*

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doing more work than that. In 'Spartan' and 'Tarentum' Horace is in fact deploying two richly evocative symbols, but symbols of directly opposite signification. Tarentum may have been Spartan in foundation, but while the mention of Sparta conjured up (then as now) associations of toughness and resilience, *patientia* (*Carm.* 1.7.10),[8] Tarentum in historical times was a byword for moral laxity and soft living. Horace's own epithets for the city are *molle* (*Serm.* 2.4.34)[9] and *imbelle* (*Epist.* 1.7.45, in antithesis to *regia Roma*), and he expresses an appropriate ambition to retire there in the less austere mode of lyric represented by *Odes* 2.6. Cicero tellingly combines a dig at Tarentum with a caricature of Epicureanism in a letter to his protégé C. Trebatius Testa, serving with Caesar in Gaul (*Fam.* 7.12.1): *indicauit mihi Pansa meus Epicureum te esse factum. o castra praeclara! quid tu fecisses si Tarentum et non Samarobriuam misissem?* ('Pansa has communicated to me that you have become an Epicurean. What a glorious camp! What would you have done if I had sent you to Tarentum rather than Amiens?'). This may again encourage us to discern an implied antithesis in Horace's poem. For if Tarentum could feature in a Ciceronian parody of Epicureanism, Regulus is an illustration that the orator reaches for in his more Stoic moments, when he attacks a representative of Epicurean hedonism at *Fin.* 2.65, for instance, or illustrates the Stoic doctrine that virtue is a sufficient condition for happiness at *Parad.* 16.[10] What matters for our interpretation of 3.5, however, is that Tarentum represented exactly the kind of moral corruption deplored by Regulus, and stood for the precise opposite of what the word 'Spartan' evokes.

The Regulus Ode is a poem constructed around simple polarities, Regulus and the *miles Crassi*, morality and decadence, Rome and the enemy. 'Spartan' and 'Tarentum' constitute an equivalent polarity, but embodied in a single phenomenon, a contemporary city, and the implication is that Tarentum is not true to the high standards of its foundation: once it was a place of which even Regulus could have approved, but now it embodies the kind of depravity and abandonment displayed by the *miles Crassi*, forgetful of its past. Strabo's account of Tarentine history (*Geog.* 6.3.4), which follows a description of the Spartan foundation, confirms that the decadence (in the full sense of the word) of Tarentum was proverbial. This actually takes the form of a narrative of decline, concluding with tokens of that decline which echo the terms of Regulus' argument:

> Once the Tarantini were exceptionally powerful.. . .. But later, owing to their prosperity, luxury prevailed to such an extent that there were more public festivals celebrated among them in a year than there were days; and as a result they were also badly governed. One indication of their poor policies was that they used foreign generals. . .

[8] Cf. Nep. *Alc.* 11.4: the adaptable Alcibiades *apud Lacedaemonios, quorum moribus summa uirtus in patientia ponebatur, sic duritiae se dedisse ut parsimonia uictus atque cultus omnes Lacedaemonios uinceret*: 'in Sparta, where according to custom the highest virtue was considered to lie in endurance, cultivated toughness to such a degree that in the austerity of his food and appearance he surpassed all the Spartans'. Cicero's eyewitness account of Spartan youths 'fighting with unbelievable tenacity, with fists, feet, nails, even teeth, dying rather than admitting defeat' (*Tusc.* 5.77) offers a close analogy to Regulus' austere principles.

[9] Macrobius (*Sat.* 3.18.13) discerns an etymological play here, citing Favorinus for a derivation of *Tarentinus* (as if *terentinus*) from *terenus*, 'which means *molle* in the Sabine dialect'. See F. Muecke, *Horace, Satires II* (Warminster, 1993), *ad* 2.4.34. Sabine is, of course, an excellent language in which to condemn luxury.

[10] Cf. R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book II* (Oxford, 1978), 95; Harrison (n. 6), 504, though the latter's description of Regulus as a 'Stoic hero' may be a little strong. He does not seem to have fulfilled such a role outside the texts of Cicero.

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In Livy, Cn. Manlius Volso, cos. 189 B.C., is able to use the example of Tarentum as part of an argument from eugenics designed to convince his troops that the Celts who had migrated to Galatia are nothing to fear: *Tarentinis quid ex Spartana dura illa et horrida disciplina mansit?* ('What has remained to the Tarentines of that hard and rugged Spartan discipline?') (38.17.12). Tarentum, among other *exempla*, proves Volso's maxim that 'whatever grows in its own proper place is sounder (*generosius*); transplanted to soil alien to it, its nature changes and it deteriorates (*degenerat*) towards that in which it is nourished.'

Once again the sentiments resonate with the Regulus Ode. In Horace's poem, too, Tarentum, a town that has lost its essence, is an object lesson in the consequences of not maintaining links with the past.[11] The last two words of 3.5, *Lacedaemonium Tarentum*, encode a peremptory admonition to the reading Roman which encapsulates the stark moral of this Roman Ode: show respect for the past, maintain the Roman way—or go the way of Tarentum.

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doi:10.1093/cq/bmi030

WHY DIDN'T CONSTANTIUS II EAT FRUIT?

At the end of his obituary notice on the death of the emperor Constantius II, Ammianus Marcellinus follows his usual practice in presenting first the virtues of the emperor, and then his vices. Among the former, Ammianus includes the following: *Quod autem nec os tersisse umquam vel nares in publico nec spuisse nec transtulisse in partem alterutram vultum aliquando est visus, nec pomorum quoad vixerat, gustaverit, ut dicta saepius praetermitto* (21.16.7).[1] Ammianus had, indeed, previously described Constantius' self-control in refraining from spitting, wiping his nose, or moving his head in public, in his elaborate portrayal of the emperor's *adventus* into Rome in 357 (16.10). The avoidance of these three activities had also been enjoined upon Persian grandees by Xenophon's fictionalized Cyrus long before, but Cyrus appears to have been utterly unconcerned about his associates' consumption of fruit.[2] Frakes has argued that Ammianus' formulaic use of the word *dicta* suggests that the historian discussed the emperor's curious abstention from fruit in an

[11] Comparable to Tarentum is Croton, another eighth-century Greek colony on the Golfo di Taranto, also proverbially in decline (Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 2.1.1; Livy 23.30.6). F. I. Zeitlin, 'Romanus Petronius: a study of the Troiae Halosis and the Bellum Civile', *Latomus* 30 (1971), 56–82, at 67–73, considers Petronius' Croton, *urbem antiquissimam et aliquando Italiae primam* which is now given over entirely to *captatio* (*Sat.* 116). For Zeitlin it is, like Horace's Tarentum according to my argument, a city bearing comparison with Rome, but whether as a type or anti-type is in each case rather up to the Romans. The most notoriously hedonistic southern Italian city of all, Sybaris, also stood on this stretch of coast, and also receives a narrative of decline from Strabo (6.1.13), although this original foundation no longer stood in Horace's day.

[1] 'That no one ever saw him wipe his mouth or nose in public, or spit, or turn his face in either direction, or that so long as he lived he never tasted fruit, I leave unmentioned, since it has often been related' (trans. J. C. Rolfe).

[2] Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.41; M. P. Charlesworth, 'Imperial deportment: two texts and some questions', *JRS* 37 (1947), 34–8; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), 231–3.

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