Horace: Biographical Information

Quintus Horatius Flaccus

- b. Dec. 8, 65 BC at Venosa, a Roman military colony, to a freedman and collector in auction sales (coactor) – see p. x in West for more info.

Academic career

- Attended school of grammarian Orbilius in Rome (described by Horace as “plagosus” – “lavish with blows”)
- Went to Greece where he studied philosophy. Interrupted by military career.

Military career

- After Caesar was assassinated (44 BC), Horace joined Brutus’ republican army,
  - given command of a legion (military tribune).
- Battle at Philippi in 42 BC (Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius) brought his military career to an end.
Professional life

- Returned to Rome in 41 BC (amnesty),
  - Venosa farm confiscated.
- Took job as a *scriba quaestorius*, a clerk to the supervisor of Roman financial affairs and audits.
- Began writing poetry and meeting poets and other writers.
  - Introduced by Vergil and Varius to Maecenas (Octavian’s “culture minister” and patron of writers) in 38 BC.
  - Maecenas gave him a Sabine farm in 33 BC (financial security, refuge from bustle of Rome).
  - Close with Augustus, but not in servitude. (Augustus asked Horace to be his personal secretary; Horace turned him down.)
- Died on Nov. 27, 8 BC.

Publications

- *Satires*: First book of 10 poems probably published in 35 BC. Topics varied from greed, adultery, a trip diary, his own social position, arguments, witchcraft, luxury, philosophical dialogues, gastronomy, mythological fantasy et cetera.
- *Epodes*: 17 short poems, written between 41 and 30 BC, published with the second book of *Satires* in 30 BC.
- *Odes*: Three books, 88 poems total, published in 23 BC.
- *Epistles*: Book 1 published in 20 BC, comprised of 20 poems ranging from 16 to over 1000 lines. Addressed to a variety of friends and officials on subjects from morality in Homer, literary activity, Epicurean precepts, dinner invitation, independence and living away from Rome, city life and country life, travel, the *vir bonus* and others. Books 2 and 3 were probably published posthumously.

Horace himself is the principal source for information on his life from autobiographical statements and allusions to contemporary goings-on.