THE BOOK OF *IAMBI*

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Abstract: I give an overview of the chronology and genesis of the book, paying special attention to Horace’s adaptation of his Greek models, namely Archilochus. The single poems are analyzed in thematic order.

Keywords: iambus, Archilochus, Callimachus, imitation

1. Chronology and Structure

1.1. Chronology

The book of poems, which Horace himself calls *iambi* (Epod. 14.7; Epist. 1.19.23), is known today as the book of *Epodes*,¹ a title attached to it by ancient Grammarians and not attested earlier than Porphyry’s commentary;² it probably contains some of the earliest poetry of Horace that survives. *Epod.* 7 and 16, at least, were written before Horace was introduced to Maecenas; *Epod.* 16 can hardly be earlier than 38 BC (after Virg. Ecl. 4);³ *Epod.* 7, written a little earlier, belongs to late 39–early 38 BC.⁴ *Epod.* 10, which as *Epod.* 16 refers to Virgil’s *Eclogues*,⁵ may also be very early.⁶ There are affinities in character between the obscene attacks on libidinous old women in *Epod.* 8 and 12 and *Serm.* 1.2; the latter may be a rather early piece of *Satires* I, as it is already presupposed by *Serm.* 1.4; but this is uncertain and such

¹ The English translations of quotations from Horace in this and all chapters written by me are taken from Rudd (1973) and Rudd (2005), for Virgil’s *Aeneid* from Ahl and Fantham (2007), for Greek lyric poetry from West (1993) or Page (1955), for Epicurus from Bailey (1989).
² Mankin 1995: 12.
³ See above, p. 24 n. 82.
⁵ See below, pp. 108 f. and above 24 n. 82.
affinities cannot be used as a reliable criterion of date.\textsuperscript{7} Epod. 5 is probably later than Serm. 1.8,\textsuperscript{8} but again this is by no means certain. Only Epod. 1 and 9 can with certainty be dated shortly after Actium.\textsuperscript{9} Thus, as far as it can be documented, the composition of the \textit{Epodes} ranges from at least 38 BC to 30 BC, when the book was probably published, more or less at the same time as \textit{Satires} II. But if we bear in mind the all too obvious difficulties Horace must have encountered in embarking on the entirely new metrical experiment of the \textit{Epodes} it is impossible that a piece like \textit{Epode} 16, which strays far from Archilochean invective \textit{stricto sensu}, was Horace’s first attempt at the form; we can be certain that Horace attempted to write in epodic meter—presumably in pure iambics—before 38 BC. Thus, it is quite likely that some of the minor compositions from \textit{Epod}. 1–10, not only \textit{Epod}. 7, were written earlier.

We have little opportunity to trace the development of Horace’s early poetry. But it emerges that during the first ten years or so for which his activity as a poet can be documented, he published two books of hexametrical poetry (in a Roman genre) of ten or eight long pieces, both books of well over one thousand lines (1028 and 1083); in parallel, Horace began to try his hand at new meters and models from archaic Greek poetry. It is clear that this new experiment required much harder work before it produced results that were satisfactory to the poet; the book of \textit{Epodes} contains only seventeen pieces of together 625ll., all but four (\textit{Epod}. 2, 5, 16, and 17) rather short; one of the longest, \textit{Epod}. 17, is composed not in epodic meter but in stichic iambic trimeter.\textsuperscript{10} Even though Horace uses six different epodic meters, he does not exhaust the variety of metrical forms of his professed model Archilochus, and ten poems are written in pure iambics. Five pieces are in iambodactylic meter,\textsuperscript{11} only one pattern is used twice (\textit{Epod}. 14 and 15), and \textit{Epod}. 12 is dactylic. Both the small number of poems and the restriction to a few metrical patterns, with marked preference for the most simple one, surely attest to the difficulties Horace had when he first embarked on his experiment.

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\item \textsuperscript{7} It is a more likely guess that Serm. 1.7 is early (see above, p. 24 n. 82) because it recounts an episode of Brutus’s Asian campaign and perhaps also because it is by far the shortest (only 33ll.), but this is far from certain.
\item \textsuperscript{8} Fraenkel 1957: 62.
\item \textsuperscript{9} See below, pp. 191 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Cf. Mankin 1995: 22.
\item \textsuperscript{11} If the pattern of \textit{Epod}. 16 (hexameter + iambic dimeter) is not attested in Archilochus, this is probably chance, see Watson 2003: 44 f., but Cavarzere (1992: 27) may well be right to assign Arch. fr. 125 West to this meter.
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