Abstract: On the basis of some universal corruptions it must be concluded that the extant manuscripts ultimately derive from one source in the ancient world, which may have been furnished with diacritical signs. The tradition of these extant manuscripts had probably split into two families, one less cohesive than the other, in antiquity, but there has been much ‘contamination’ between the two. The lost Blandinian manuscript in the hexametrical poems has drawn on a different source, and some readings in this line of descent have filtered into a few of the extant manuscripts.

Keywords: Contamination, scholia, Mavortius, Valerius Probus, diacritical signs

Noteworthy discussions of this topic are:

Vollmer 1905
Lenchantin De Gubernatis 1937
Pasquali 1952: 374–385
Brink 1971: 1–43
Tarrant in Reynolds 1983: 182–185
Enciclopedia Oraziana I 319–354 (various authors). Henceforward referred to by EO and page number only.

The fullest available information about manuscript readings can be gained from:

Keller 1899–1925
Lenchantin De Gubernatis 1945/1958
Bo 1959.

As methodology requires that discussions of this subject be mostly based on manuscript errors (see section 5, below), it becomes important to decide which manuscript readings are in fact erroneous. Since the opinions of scholars differ widely on this, and my own are as subjective as anyone else’s, it is necessary to take into account the judgment of a number of scholars. The most eminent editors of Horace, those who consider problems
most conscientiously and whose judgments carry most weight, seem to me to be:

(all the works) R. Bentley (1711), A. Meineke (1854), F. Vollmer (1912), D.R. Shackle-
ton Bailey (2001)
(Odes, CS, Epodes) L. Mueller (1900; much superior to his editions of the Satires and 
Epistles, 1891–1893)
(Odes I–II) R.G.M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard (1970–1978); (Odes III) Nisbet and N. Rudd 
(2004)
(Satires) A. Palmer (1891); occasional reference is also made to Courtney 1996a.
(Epistles II and Ars Poetica) C.O. Brink (1971–1982).

I have not labeled as corrupt anything that is not so considered, or at least severely doubted, by three or more of the above.

Whereas we have manuscripts of Virgil from the ancient world, for Horace the earliest extant manuscripts belong to the ninth century, and modern editors base their texts on a selection (usually of about 12–16) dating from the ninth to the eleventh centuries. There exist hundreds of others; a list of 860 is compiled by C. Villa (1992/1993/1994) and in EO (319), and Munk Olsen (1982–1989), with occasional supplements in Revue d’histoire des textes, who lists and describes those that fall within his period. Many of these have never been investigated fully or at all, and some perhaps never even catalogued. The labor invested in such investigation would be unlikely to gain proportionate rewards, but we cannot know this for sure; Vollmer came across the useful manuscript K by accident, and one manuscript of the fifteenth century, to be adduced in section 3, has its importance. Because of extensive horizontal transmission of variants (‘contamination’), many of them recorded in extant manuscripts and to be presumed in lost ones, it is not possible to arrange the manuscripts in a comprehensive stemma. Nevertheless, I think it is possible to draw up a skeleton stemma that can show the affinities of some of the principal manuscripts and some of the cross-currents; the accompanying diagram, which I shall try to validate in my discussion, illustrates my attempt to do this. In this, dotted lines indicate uncertainty about the exact point at which contamination debouches and/or originates.