



CSCP Support Materials for Eduqas GCSE Latin

Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources (Themes)

Theme A: Romans in the Countryside

Horace: The changing face of the countryside

For examination in 2024-2026

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the follow:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.
- **Acknowledgements** of the works used in preparing these notes

Horace: Odes 2.15 – The changing face of the countryside

Horace contrasts the decadence of Rome's aristocrats to the old simple way of life

Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 BC – 8 BC) was a lyric poet writing under the emperor Augustus. Horace was born in southern Italy, at that time an area still closely associated with the Greek world, and he grew up steeped in Hellenistic culture. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar, he fought alongside Brutus against Antony and Octavian (the later Augustus). When Brutus was defeated, Horace accepted a pardon from Octavian and returned to Italy, but his family estates had been confiscated, as had those of many others during the civil wars. Horace later received the patronage of Maecenas, one of Augustus' closest advisers and was given a country estate in the Sabine hills, east of Rome. The first three books of the *Odes* appeared in 23 BC.

In this poem, Horace is concerned that small farms have been taken over by sprawling country mansions with vast pools and frivolous trees and flowers that are replacing more productive crops such as vines or olives. In contrast, Horace mentions Romulus and Cato, prominent figures from Rome's past, as examples of those who believed in personal poverty and public wealth, rejecting private porticoes for turf huts, and spending money on the town and temples.

Text

iam pauca aratro iugera regiae

moles relinquent, undique latius

extenta visentur Lucrino

stagna lacu platanusque caelebs

evincet ulmos; tum violaria et

[5]

myrtus et omnis copia narium

spargent olivetis odorem

fertilibus domino priori;

tum spissa ramis laurea fervidos
 excludet ictus. non ita Romuli [10]
 praescriptum et intonsi Catonis
 auspiciis veterumque norma.

privatus illis census erat brevis,
 commune magnum; nulla decempedis
 metata privatis opacam [15]
 porticus excipiebat Arcton,

nec fortuitum spernere caespitem
 leges sinebant, oppida publico
 sumptu iubentes et deorum
 templa novo decorare saxo. [20]

Notes

metre: Alcaic metre, named after the Greek poet Alcaeus. Stanzas of four lines, the first two with 11 syllables, the third with 9, and the fourth with 10.

v	—	v	—	—		—	v	v	—	v	v
—											
v	—	v	—	—		—	v	v	—	v	v
—											
	v	—	v	—	—	—	v	—	v		
	—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	—	v	—

This poem is split into 2 complex sentences. The first 10 lines (to ictus) depict contemporary ostentation in contrast to the second 10 lines which depict the simple way of life of Rome's great men of the past.

- 1 **iam:** 'Before long' a time marker, added to by the word *tum* repeated later in the poem (lines 5 and 9). The adverb draws attention to the hyperbole of the first section, warning of future decadence.

pauca: paired with *iugera* 'a few acres'.

aratro: ploughing was to be encouraged as traditional hard work providing food although it was more economical to import grain in bulk from Africa.

regiae: translated as 'aristocratic' in describing the owners of the mansions. It can also be translated as 'princely' and it associates the wealthy landowners with kings. The Romans had been keen to avoid kings after the beginning of the Republic, despite Augustus' consolidation of power as a sole ruler by the time of the poem. This therefore sets a derogatory tone, highlighting the power and arrogance of the wealthy, despite the fact most became wealthy from business (comparison could be made with modern day leaders).

- 2 **moles:** translated as 'mansions' but literally means a great mass. This emphasises the sheer amount of space taken up by the houses while the blandness of the word suggests the uselessness of the houses.

relinquent: notably future tense rather than present tense. A dire prophecy or warning.

Lines 1-2 describe the decline in the number of small holdings in Italy. There could be a number of reasons for this: the death of the landowners and destruction of land in the recent civil war, the increasing number of affluent Romans with large estates and the decrease in profitability of small holdings due to an increase in goods imported from Rome's provinces.

undique latius extenta: three words to emphasise the scale of the spread of such pools on what was previously farmland.

- 3 **visentur:** as with '**relinquent**' in the previous line, the future tense suggests a dire prophecy or warning.

Lucrino: a lake close to Baiae. Horace has perhaps chosen it due to it being a well-known large lake and because Baiae was known for its decadent *villae*. *Lucrino* and *lacu* in the next line are ablatives of comparison after *latius*. When Horace wrote this poem, the lake had recently been joined to Lake Avernus to form the naval harbour 'portus Iulius', built by Agrippa, making its extent even more spectacular (Nisbet and Hubbard. 1978, p245).

- 4 **stagna:** paired with *extenta* 'the extended pools'. Horace has deliberately used *stagna* literally 'standing water', derived from *stare* (Nisbet and Hubbard, 1978, p. 245), to imply stagnation. It is important to note that these 'pools' are used for raising fish for the rich man's table. Horace may be making a variety of points with his choice of this word. Creating such pools to farm fish could be considered to be interfering with the order of nature

(emphasised by the *stagna* interrupting the natural pairing of *Lucurino* with *lacu*). Also, the excessive size of these pools which are growing ever bigger reflects the excessively extravagant lifestyles of the wealthy.

platanusque caelebs: the plane tree was an ornamental tree imported from Greece and Asia, attested to be placed in private gardens in numerous works of Latin literature (Cicero *De Oratores* 1.28, Seneca *Epistles* 12.2, Pliny the Younger *Epistles* 5.6.20). It is *caelebs* 'solitary' because, unlike elms (*ulmos*), it could not be used to support vines. *Caelebs* (which can also be translated as unmarried) stands in contrast to the *fertilibus* in line 8. In Catullus 62.54 the process of supporting vines is called 'marrying' the tree to the vine. After Augustus' moral reforms encouraging childbirth, *caelebs* would be particularly evocative of uselessness and self-indulgence.

- 5 **envincet**: another future tense verb. Placed in the unusual position at the beginning of a line and before the end of the clause. Showing the subversion of the natural order by the wiping out of elms.

Lines 1-5 Horace has used a *tricolon* (losing land for farming, large pools for fishing and the spread of plane trees) to show the encroachment of wealth on the old simple way of life before *tum* in line 5.

tum: marks the start of a new thought as Horace moves onto *horti*. Horace has used the language of prophecies – a prediction followed by things that will naturally occur should it come true. Here, Horace warns of the loss of viticulture and olive growing caused by creating gardens for the pleasure from the aroma and shade from trees.

violaria: along with *myrtus* in line 6. Both violets and myrtles were used to make garlands, often worn at parties. Horace may be hoping to link them to the luxury of having time to party, rather than working the land.

et...et: the repetition of *et* here (*polysyndeton*) emphasises the numerous smells from the flowers assaulting the nostrils.

- 6 **copia narium**: literally 'wealth of the nostrils' with *narium* being the possessive genitive as if the nostrils owned the abundance. A very striking way to emphasise the aroma of smells being taken in. Horace is highlighting the smells to make the point that they are being grown for their scent, rather than as crops.

- 7 **spargent**: another future tense verb. It can be used to describe the sowing (or sprinkling) of seed but here it is the smells rather than the seed which is scattered.

olivētis: paired with *fertilibus* in line 8. An ablative of place indicating the smells take the place of olives (growing olives would have been a more productive use of the land).

8 **priori**: an important word contrasting the warning of the future with the traditional, productive work of the former master.

9 **tum**: repetition from line 5 leads the reader on through the sequence of changes that indicate decline from productive farming to wasteful decadence.

spissa ramis laurea: *ramis* is an ablative explaining why the tree is thick 'the laurel tree thick with branches.' Horace may be criticising the practice of cutting back to promote new growth to give denser shade. It is ironic that that a tree whose branches symbolised victory in athletic competition is now used to provide shade for idle Romans.

10 **ictus**: paired with *fervidos*, literally 'burning darts', here used to indicate the rays of the sun (*metonymy*).

non ita: this emphatic phrase moves us to the idyllic ways of the past. Note the verbs now change to the past tense.

Romuli: Romulus symbolises Rome at its mythical foundation in 753 BC. Horace here claims that Rome was founded on traditional values of farming the land. Romans believed that Romulus had lived in a single-roomed hut, preserved on the Palatine hill. Horace may also be bringing to mind and obliquely praising Augustus who himself lived on the Palatine Hill, near this hut.

11 **intonsi Catonis**: Barbers had not been introduced to Rome until 300 BC. This is echoing the idea that it is extravagant to spend time clipping back trees in line 9, here it is extravagant to cut hair. Horace is invoking the stern older Cato when he had been *ensor*. Cato was almost a synonym for the ideas of returning to old Roman virtue and he had himself boasted that he had a hard upbringing on the Sabine hills.

Nisbet and Hubbard (1978, p243) refer to Horace's choice of Romulus and Cato as exemplars as follows: 'nothing is known of the former and too much of the latter.'

12 **auspiciis**: the choice of the word '*auspicium*' for instruction evokes an almost religious tone. Leaders of expeditions, such as war campaigns, were expected to take the auspices – that is interpret signs from the gods. In this way, it also implies a sense of the good leadership of past generations.

norma: literally means a set square, it adds a sense of precision and order, echoed also in line 14 *decempedis*.

- 13** **privatus:** this word is an emphatic addition as '*census*' already implies private wealth.

illis: refers back to the '*veteres*' (past generations) mentioned in line 12.

The final two stanzas (lines 13 to 20) highlight how old rural ideals privilege the state over the individual and make a sustained contrast between private and public. Lines 13-14 compare *privatus* with *commune* (both placed in prominent positions at the beginning of the line).

- 14** **decempedis:** literally ten feet to indicate a ten-foot ruler used by surveyors and architects. Terms of measurement (also line 12 *norma*) give the second half of the poem an ordered and precise feeling. It also makes the private colonnades feel excessively large.

- 15** **privatis:** *anaphora* (repetition) of *privatus*. Continuing the contrast of public vs private.

opacam: paired with *Arcton* (line 16) 'the shady Northern light'. *Arctos* is the constellation of Ursa Major so the wind blowing from there would be the North Wind and therefore cold.

- 16** It is not entirely obvious what Horace means in lines 14-16. On the surface, it appears that he is criticising privately built colonnades for not providing shade. It is more likely that he is pointing out that in the past colonnades were built using public funds and provided shade for the public good.

- 17** **nec:** this is the third negative (*non* line 10 and *nulla* line 14) word used since the change to discussing the traditional past. It gives these lines a reprimanding tone.

fortuitum: something you might stumble upon and is therefore re-used. This is in contrast to *novo* (the new material) in line 20.

caespitem: both grass and a building material which could be used to build walls but more commonly as a roofing material. There were many houses in country districts with this type of roof. It may also allude to the house of Romulus mentioned above which would have been built in this fashion.

- 18** **leges sinebant:** this is hyperbole. The law did not prevent this, but it did restrict the use of expensive materials.

- 19** **publico:** paired with *sumptu*. Horace believes it is more important to use money for public funds to be spent on public building projects, rather than on private accumulation of wealth and property.

- 20** **novo decorare saxo:** reusing old materials had been normal Roman practice so having new stone would have been considered extravagant. In the Roman past, the law had restricted the use of marble to only temples. The Romans believed spending money on temples would help to keep the gods on Rome's side. Augustus is keen to demonstrate this in his *Res Gestae*, focusing on his building projects, especially of temples.

In Rome's past, *villae* were plastered with stucco or perhaps faced with second hand marble. Horace implies here that *villae* in his day are faced with new stone, just like the public areas and temples of old.

The contrast of the past and contemporary Rome are also emphasised by the verb *decorare*. In the past, newly cut stone was considered decoration, an additional ornament, whereas in Horace's day many *villae* were faced with this. Horace may also be hinting at Augustus' famous quote 'I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.'

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each line or couplet, asking questions so that the class is led to comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin

iam pauca aratro iugera regiae moles relinquent (lines 1-2):

- What will soon replace farmland that used to be ploughed?
- How are the owners of the mansions described and how does that affect the way we view them?

undique latius extenta visentur Lucrino stagna lacu (lines 2-4):

- What will be seen everywhere and how big are they compared to the Lucrine Lake?
- What is a 'stagnum' and how might it be used for a leisurely and decadent life?

platanusque caelebs evincet ulmos (lines 4-5):

- What is going to wipe out the elms?
- Why is it extravagant to have the *platani* rather than elm trees?

tum violaria et myrtus et omnis copia narium spargent ...ordorem (lines 5-7):

- What other plants do the aristocrats have in their gardens?
- What effect do these plants have?

olivētis ... fertilibus domino priori (lines 7-8):

- What are the violets and myrtle bushes replacing?
- Who had planted the olive groves?
- How are the *olivētis* described and why are they described in this way?

tum spissa ramis laurea fervidos excludet ictus (lines 9-10):

- What tree is providing shade?
- What did the Romans do to the *laurea* to make it better at providing shade?
- What are the burning darts (*fervidos ictus*)?

non ita Romuli praescriptum et intonsi Catonis auspiciis veterumque norma (lines 10-12):

- What two Romans are used as examples of the old Roman way of life?
- Why were each of these Romans chosen as examples?
- What are the *auspiciis* and *veterum norma*?

privatus illis census erat brevis, commune magnum (lines 13-14):

- For past generations, which was bigger, public or private wealth?

nulla decempedis metata privatis opacam / porticus excipiebat Arcton (lines 14-16):

- What porticoes do not receive the shady northern light?
- What does *opacam Arcton* literally mean? What is its meaning in these lines?

nec fortuitum spernere caespitem leges sinebant (lines 17-18):

- What does Horace say the law prevented Romans from doing?
- What does *fortuitum* imply about the origins of the turf?
- What can caespes (turf) be used for?

oppida publico sumptu iubentes (decorare) (lines 18-19):

- What did the laws order past generations to do to their towns?
- What money was used to do this to the towns?

et deorum templa novo decorare saxo (lines 19-20):

- What else were the Romans supposed to decorate?
- What material should have been used to decorate these?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-5) How does Horace show his disapproval at the use of land by the wealthy?
2. (lines 5-10) How does Horace suggest the uselessness of the flowers growing in gardens?
3. (lines 1-10) How does Horace effectively warn his readers of an unproductive future?
4. (line 1-10) Is Horace criticising leisure time? Use examples from the text to explain your point of view.
5. (lines 10-12) How does Horace show his wish that Romans return to the ways of the past?
6. (lines 13-20) How does Horace's style and content show what he considers the Romans in his day should be spending money on?
7. (lines 10-20) What impression does Horace give of life in Rome's past? Do you think that Horace would persuade Romans to go back to this way of life?

Discussion

Themes: wealth, leisure/work, use of land, private/public

Horace here is comparing life in the past to life in his own time. Students may wish to consider whether they would like to go back to an old way of life. Has modern consumerism and leisure time damaged us and our values? In particular, is it wasteful to use land for personal wealth, comfort and enjoyment?

Horace also criticises Romans who use their wealth to appear like kings. Should people with wealth 'have a chip on their shoulder'? Does wealth indicate higher status?

Horace calls upon legendary figures in Romulus and Cato. Romulus founded Rome after killing his brother and Cato was notorious for his strict moral code. Do we have any figures in our own past that exemplify how we should act? Are these actually good role models?

The last part of Horace's poem discusses the issue of public vs private. Should we use wealth on our public services? In our own times, we may choose to spend taxes on the NHS, the police or other public services like libraries but Horace believes public funds should be used on religious buildings and public buildings like porticoes. Is it right to expect those with wealth to spend it not on themselves but for the good of everyone?

It is notoriously difficult to pin down what Horace actually thinks. Is Horace's tone straightforward here? Does he really believe that private wealth has gone too far, that too much time is spent on leisure and that Romans should return their focus to their duty to the state? Are there any parts of his poem that appear exaggerated and perhaps disingenuous?

Horace's relationship with Maecenas, who supported writers on behalf of Augustus, is well attested. Horace was part of a circle of poets who were under the patronage of Maecenas, and so Augustus. Augustus instituted a series of moral reforms, focussed on rebuilding the traditional Roman way of life which he believes will restore Rome, the Romans' relationship with the gods and stop the moral degradation it had undergone previously. Is Horace writing a poem to put forward these ideas and support the Augustan regime?

Questions on the whole passage

1. What attitudes does Horace have about how Romans should use their land, wealth and time? How does this fit with the other sources you have studied?
2. What can we learn from this poem about how Romans contemporary to Horace used their land, wealth and time? Is Horace describing a problem with all of Roman society or just a part of it?
3. Considering other texts in the specification, do you think Horace's readers would agree with what he has written in this poem?

Further Information and Reading

The Cambridge Latin Course Book V Stage 35 on Roman Country Villas contains a detailed discussion in English. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

The Cambridge Latin Course Book V Stage 39 provides a short introduction to Roman poets, including the patronage of Maecenas. A digital version of this section can be found [here](#).

Acknowledgements of resources used

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