



## [Horace, Odes I.2.1-52](#)

Appeal to Augustus

**Name of the author:** Horace

**Date:** 30 BCE to 27 BCE

**Place:** Rome

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Poetry

**Title of work:** Odes

**Reference:**

I.2.1-52

### **Commentary:**

This poem from Horace's first ode consists of two parts; the first is concerned with the flooding of the river Tiber, which is interpreted as a punishment for the Roman people engaging in civil wars, while the second part considers how to repair the empire again and appease the gods, considering Augustus as integral to this. The present extract comes from the second poem in the first ode, and follows the dedication of the poem to Maecenas, who was the patron of both Horace and Virgil, and friend and political advisor to Octavian. Horace entreats the leader to aid the Roman people, referred to as the "people of Quirinus" (46) - the name given to Romulus after his deification (see [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XIV.805-828](#)). Augustus's own future deification, or perhaps an insinuation that he is in fact already a god in human form (as is argued by Daniel Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and Odes*, p. 203), is also apparent here in verse 45, with Horace pleading with him not to return "to the sky" (i.e. the heavens) until he has stayed amongst the Roman people for a long time. This recalls Virgil's first *Georgic* ([I.498-514](#)), in which Virgil pleads with the gods not to recall Augustus to their realm until they have allowed him sufficient time to aid Rome in its post-civil war struggles. Horace looks forward to Augustus's future victories, referring not only to the triumphal celebrations that he will lead (49), but also to the peoples that he will lead Rome in quashing, such as the Medes (Parthians) (51). Even though Alexander the Great had destroyed the Persian empire by the time Horace wrote, he follows the convention of the Augustan poets in referring to the Parthians as *Medi* and *Persae*, in order to give a more dramatic image of their eastern enemies. Horace exaggerates the specific threat posed by the Parthians here in a patriotic nod to Augustus's supremacy. Daniel Garrison argues that the prominent role such panegyric plays in this first book of *Odes* is testament to the value the poet placed upon his closeness to the princeps, and, therefore, the centre of power (Daniel Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and Odes*, p. 203).

The misery that Rome suffers in the aftermath of the civil wars is expressed through the severity of the weather, with snow and hail storms understood as divine portents (*dirae*) – even the sacred hills (i.e. the two summits of the Capitoline) are struck with Jupiter's lightning. The dire state of affairs is enhanced with the use of anaphora in verses 4 and 5, where the verb *terreo* (to frighten/scare) is repeated, used both in relation to mankind in general (*gens*), and the city of Rome more specifically (*urbs*). The reference to Pyrrha, the wife of Deucalion, refers to the classical myth of Jupiter's destruction of mankind by a flood, which wiped out all except Deucalion and Pyrrha (see [Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* I.224-347](#)) – in what is frequently interpreted as a less-than-serious digression from the morbid subject at hand. Horace suggests that the flooding of the Tiber, likely in 27 BCE (other possibly dates are 29 or 28 BCE, as the name "Augustus," given to Octavian in the January of 27 BCE is not mentioned), was a prelude to a second apocalyptic flood. Verses 16-20 describe the destruction caused by the flood, which even brought both the house of the Pontifex Maximus (Numa's Regia) and the shrine of Vesta to the ground, and was understood as vengeance on the part of the river god for the death of Ilia, who was both the mother of Romulus and Remus and a Vestal Virgin, and was subsequently drowned in the Tiber as punishment for breaking her vow of virginity. As legend goes, the river god took Ilia as his wife. The mention of the Tuscan shore in verse 14 is debated, but may refer to the understanding that the flooding of the Tiber was caused by excessive winds preventing the river from flowing out properly into the sea, meaning that the coast north of the Tiber flooded. Alternatively, it could refer to the western bank of the Tiber where the river turns sharply, resulting in what may have looked like the throwing back of the water from the bank to the city (see Daniel Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and*



Odes, p. 204).

The crisis that Horace describes is also one of feared abandonment by their gods – Vesta, angry at the murder of Julius Caesar, the Pontifex Maximus, will not heed her people's prayers (27-28). Apollo, the god of prophecy, was afforded much devotion by Augustus, who built a temple to him on the Palatine in 28 BCE. Apollo was believed to be the father of Augustus (Suetonius, *Augustus* 94.4), who aided his son at the battle of Actium. It is only fitting, therefore, that Horace invokes him for assistance here. Venus, mother of Aeneas, Mars, father of Romulus, and Mercury are also called upon, the former as the divine ancestor not only of the Romans, but of the Julian family, and the latter as the avenger of Julius Caesar (33-44). According to Daniel Garrison (*Horace: Epodes and Odes*, p. 205), Mercury, the god of trade and commerce, is invoked in order to allude to the more peaceful endeavours that Augustus will instigate. Alternatively, it could be that Horace asks Mercury to take on Octavian's role as the avenger of Caesar, then equates Mercury with Octavian, who is destined one day to become a god just like his adoptive father, Caesar.

Keywords in the original language:

- [augur Apollo](#)
- [dirus](#)
- [gens](#)
- [Jupiter](#)
- [Mars](#)
- [Medi](#)
- [pater](#)
- [populus](#)
- [princeps](#)
- [Quirinus](#)
- [saeculum](#)
- [templum](#)
- [terreo](#)
- [triumphus](#)
- [ultor](#)
- [urbs](#)
- [virgo](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Apollo](#)
- [Augustus](#)
- [civil war](#)
- [deification](#)
- [fear](#)
- [Jupiter](#)
- [Mars](#)
- [Mercury](#)
- [Parthians](#)
- [portent](#)
- [Quirinus](#)
- [Roman people](#)
- [Rome \(city\)](#)
- [temple](#)
- [Tiber](#)
- [triumph](#)
- [vengeance](#)
- [Venus](#)
- [Vestal virgin](#)



- [war](#)

**Bibliographical references:**

[A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I](#)

Nisbet, R. G. M., Hubbard, Margaret book *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book I* Oxford Oxford University Press 1970

[Horace: Epodes and Odes: A New Annotated Latin Edition](#)

Garrison, Daniel H. book *Horace: Epodes and Odes: A New Annotated Latin Edition* London University of Oklahoma Press 1991

**Other sources connected with this document:** Text

[Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XIV.805-828](#)

The ascension of Romulus to heaven

- [Read more about Ovid, \*Metamorphoses\* XIV.805-828](#)

Text

[Virgil, \*Georgics\* I.498-514](#)

Prayer for the young Caesar to help a struggling world

- [Read more about Virgil, \*Georgics\* I.498-514](#)

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