



[Horace, Odes II.1.29-40](#)

Lament over the civil wars

Name of the author: Horace

Date: 1st BCE

Place: Rome

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Literary genre: Poetry

Title of work: Odes

Reference:

II.1.29-40

Commentary:

Horace's second ode is dedicated to Asinius Pollio, who had himself written a contemporary history including the civil wars, which Horace mentions at various points at the beginning of the poem. The lamenting tone of this passage expresses the trauma that Rome is currently suffering in the civil wars. Horace's dirge bemoans the excessive loss of Roman life, and goes so far as to suggest that the state's self-destructive actions are an act of impiety (30). As Richard Lyne states, the confidence that Horace expressed in *Ode I.11*, where the poet looks forward to what Augustus will achieve, seems here to have been "sapped" (Richard Lyne, *Behind the Public Poetry*, p. 93). The invocation of the Muse at the end of the passage breaks with the tone of what has preceded, with Horace wishing to adopt a less funerary tone (he makes reference here to Simonides of Ceos, who was known for writing epitaphs for those who had died in the Persian wars).

Horace uses the term *Latino* instead of *Romano* here (29), which is typical of his patriotic poetry, and accentuates the broad regional nature of the state's power and influence. This is further emphasised with the use of *Daunia* to refer to the Italian people in verse 34, which refers to king Daunus, a legendary king of Apulia, a southern-Italian region, which was famous for producing soldiers (see Daniel Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and Odes*, p. 260). Daunus, however, was also the father of Turnus, the villain of Virgil's *Aeneid*, whom Aeneas eventually defeats after a long and deadly battle with the Latin tribes, to secure the Trojans' settlement in the vicinity of future Rome. This allusion, therefore, may serve to hark back to Rome's mythical origins, and evoke the fierce and bloody struggle that its earliest founder endured in order to ensure the birth of the Roman state. By using Daunus's name to refer here to the Roman people, Horace effectively testifies to the ability of Rome to bring peoples together under its governance. The in-fighting of the civil wars is completely at odds with this. The enemies of Rome, represented here by the Persians/Parthians of verses 31-32, will hear of her struggle, the implication being that they will take delight in her pain. There may even be a reference here to the opportunistic invasion of Syria and the southern coast of Asia Minor by the Parthians following the Battle of Philippi in 44 BCE (Daniel Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and Odes*, p. 260). For Robin Seager, this poem simply sees Horace "expiate the guilt of the civil, with a hint that a Parthian war would be the natural means of doing so" (Robin Seager, "Horace and Augustus," p. 32).

Keywords in the original language:

- [bellum](#)
- [Hesperia](#)
- [inopia](#)
- [Latinus](#)
- [Medi](#)
- [ruina](#)
- [sanguis](#)



Thematic keywords in English:

- [civil war](#)
- [Italy](#)
- [king Daunus](#)
- [Parthians](#)
- [Persians](#)
- [Roman people](#)

Bibliographical references:

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Acknowledgements: Sylvie Franchet d'Espèrey

Realized by:

[Kimberley Fowler](#)



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