

Another Tiny Subtlety in Horace, *I. 1.1*

Scholars have detected numerous plausible poetic subtleties in the opening of Horace's only book of *Iambi* (1.1-2):

Ibis Liburnis inter alta navium,
amice, propugnacula,
. . . .

Watson summarizes four in his note on the first word, which I will further condense (and number):

1. "Cavarzere detects in *ibis* the heroic tones of Ode 1. 7. 26 'ibimus, o socii comitesque'."
2. *Ibis* plus imminent departure by sea marks the poem as a *propemptikon*.
3. Heyworth finds a bilingual allusion to the title of Callimachus' invective *Ibis*. (Watson is not entirely convinced.)
4. Holzberg "suggests that the projected sailing of the fleet operates at one level as a metapoetic way of announcing the commencement of a book of poems."

So far, so good, but I would like to suggest a possible fifth subtlety, perhaps less important than any of these. In his third note on the same page, Watson writes: "*inter* for *intra* with verbs of motion is uncommon", and that it "shows some affinity for contexts involving aggression or attack". I wonder if the first and third words also contain a hint of the mortal danger facing Octavian, Maecenas, and (possibly) Horace at Actium. Might *Ibis* . . . *inter* have suggested *Interibis* (*fortasse*) to sensitive Roman ears?

If so, this could be another point in favor of the opinion of a majority of scholars, that the poem was written after the battle. A poem addressed to one of the leaders of a departing military expedition with *Interibis* encoded in the first line is surely at least as bad an omen as a fig-seller shouting *Cauneas*.