

HORACE'S MONUMENT

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Exegi monumentum aere perennius
regalique situ pyramidum altius,
quod non imber edax, non Aquilo impotens
possit diruere aut innumerabilis
annorum series et fuga temporum.

Horace, *Odes* 3.30.1–5

I have finished a monument more durable than bronze and higher than the royal situs of the pyramids, the kind which neither biting rain nor the uncontrolled North Wind can destroy, or the procession of unnumbered years or flying time.

The paper argues that *altius* in line 2 is variously inappropriate; a clue to the true reading is to be found in the passage of Pindar to which Horace is alluding.

In these well-known lines Horace describes his three books of *Odes* in metaphorical terms as a monumentum or 'grave-monument'.¹ The description is well chosen because, in addition to its meanings of 'grave-monument' or 'memorial', monumentum is frequently used *tout court* to refer to works of literature.² This duality is conveniently illustrated by the very first line. Since in the eyes of the Romans bronze typified durability (cf. Plin. HN 34.99 *usus aeris ad perpetuitatem monumentorum iam pridem tralatus est tabulis aereis, in quibus publicae constitutiones inciduntur*),³ 'more enduring than bronze' makes good sense twice over: epitaphs sometimes claim that a grave-monument will last for ever (e.g. CLE 467.1 *Aeternam tibi sedem ... dicaui*),⁴ while Catullus had used the very word *perennius* when praying for the durability of his poetry (*1.10 plus uno maneat perenne saeclo*). Thus *aere perennius* is

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1 See e.g. Woodman (2012) 86–9.

2 See OLD s.v. 2–3 for the former and TLL VIII.1464.28–1465.23 for the latter.

3 Cf. Williamson (1987).

4 Cf. Korzeniewski (1972) 385.

appropriate both to the metaphor and to the *Odes*; it functions both in terms of the comparison and as a claim to poetic immortality.

Horace's second line, however, is not so straightforward. Grave-monuments frequently adopted or incorporated the shape of a pyramid: a decade after the publication of the *Odes*, for example, a substantial pyramid, faced in marble, was constructed at Rome for the former praetor C. Cestius,⁵ while at Ostia there is a miniature pyramidal tomb for one C. Annaeus Atticus.⁶ But *regali* at the start of line 2 indicates that Horace is thinking not of domestic examples but of the famous pyramids in Egypt, the resting places of the pharaohs (Strabo 17.1.33 τάφοι τῶν βασιλέων). Since the pyramids were famous above all for their height (e.g. Prop. 3.2.19 *pyramidum sumptus ad sidera ducti*, Plin. HN 36.75–82, Tac. Ann. 2.61.1 *instar montium eductae pyramides*),⁷ a reference to the superior height (*altius*) of Horace's monumentum seems at first sight natural enough; yet the text does not read 'higher than the pyramids' but 'higher than the royal situs of the pyramids', and the word *situs* has caused a great deal of scholarly trouble.

Some think that *situ* means 'decay' (OLD s.v. *situs*³) and that Horace is alluding to Simonides' famous poem on the dead at Thermopylae (531.4–5/261P), in which a burial (ἐντάφιον), because metaphorical, will not be destroyed by physical decay (εὐρώς):⁸

εὐκλειῆς μὲν ἄ τύχα, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότιμος,
 βομὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνάστις, ὁ δ'
 οἶκτος ἔπαινος·
 ἐντάφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον οὔτ' εὐρώς
 οὔθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρώσει χρῆρονος.

Theirs is a glorious fortune and a noble lot:
 for grave they have an altar, for mourning remembrance,
 for pity praise. Such a burial decay shall not darken,
 nor time the all-conqueror.

But it is no compliment to say that a monument is higher than a decayed ruin. One might attempt to get round this difficulty by adopting the interpretation favoured by D. West in his commentary, who says that *regali situ pyramidum* is an example of the 'genetivus inuersus', as it is sometimes called: "the royal decay of Pyramids" is "the decaying Pyramids of kings".⁹

5 See Toynbee (1971) Plate 33; for Cestius see Rüpke (2008) 607 no. 1139.

6 See Toynbee (1971) 102–3. There is a very extensive scholarly literature on Roman death, burial, mourning, commemoration and the like.

7 The Great Pyramid of Giza was one of the Seven Wonders and 480 feet high when originally built; it remained the tallest structure in the world until the completion of Lincoln Cathedral in 1311 (so Wikipedia).

8 So Pöschl (1970) 251–3; note also e.g. Harrison (2001) 263–4. For Simonides' poem see now Poltera (2008) 467–78, with a vast bibliography.

9 West (2002) 261, whose reference to Leumann, Hofmann and Szantyr (1972) should be to p. 152. The same notion had occurred earlier to Tracy (1966).

Yet, while it is self-evidently true that all monuments are inherently subject to decay (cf. Prop. 3.2.22), the pyramids were known to be constructed of a hard stone of ‘everlasting durability’ (Diod. 1.63.5 διαμονήν αιώνιον) and to be ‘undecayed’ in Horace’s day (ἄσηπτον): it would be very odd to draw attention to a feature that was conspicuously absent. Alternatively we might think of understanding *situ* in a proleptic sense (‘higher than the royal pyramids which one day will themselves decay’), but such a meaning is extremely difficult to extract from the Latin. Besides, any interpretation along these lines destroys the parallel with line 1, where the whole point of *monumentum aere perennius* is that bronze resists decay.

Others think that *situ* must mean ‘site’ (OLD s.v. *situs*² 1).¹⁰ A reference to ‘the royal site of the pyramids’ would make excellent sense in itself: not only were the Giza pyramids, for example, sited with impressive precision according to astronomical principles,¹¹ but well-to-do Romans took an intense interest in the arrangements for their resting place and its layout. A lengthy inscription, thought to date from Trajan’s reign, records the instructions left by an anonymous individual from the region around modern Langres in France (ILS 8379): ‘I want it completed according to the plan which I have provided, in such a way that there is a recess in the place where a seated statue, no less than 5 feet in height, can be placed, either of marble from the best possible overseas stone or of bronze ...’ The monument itself was to be situated in an orchard and alongside a lake.¹² Scholars have drawn attention to the similarity between this inscription and the instructions which are issued by Trimalchio in Petronius: ‘Are you building my *monumentum* exactly as I have ordered you?’, he begins (71.5), before saying that it must have a frontage of 100 feet and must stretch back 200 feet, thereby incorporating a memorial garden.¹³ Yet, although it is therefore attractive to draw attention to the site which the pyramids occupied, it makes little (if any) sense to say ‘higher than the royal site of the pyramids’: the point about the pyramids is not that they are sited on conspicuously high ground but that they themselves are famously high:¹⁴ the Great Pyramid at Giza is in fact two-and-a-half times the height of the plateau on which it stands. In other words, no matter whether *situ* is interpreted to mean ‘decay’ or ‘site’, its construction with *altius* is problematic.¹⁵

And this is not the only problem with *altius*. Whereas *perennius* was equally applicable both to a grave-monument and to Horace’s poetry, as we saw, in what sense can height

¹⁰ So Syndikus (2001) II.260, Nisbet and Rudd (2004) 369.

¹¹ See Clayton (1990) 21.

¹² See e.g. Champlin (1991) 26–7, 171–80, noting that ‘some testators devoted immense care to their monument’ (171).

¹³ On the whole passage see Schmeling (2011) 292–303.

¹⁴ According to Diodorus (1.63.7) the pyramids give the impression of having been made by some god and set down bodily in the surrounding sand (cf. Tac. Ann. 2.61.1 *disiectasque inter et uix peruias arenas*, ‘amidst the drifting and almost impassable sands’).

¹⁵ According to OLD (s.v. *situs*² 2), Horace’s meaning is ‘structure’, but there is no parallel.

(*altius*) be ascribed to the *Odes*?¹⁶ It might be thought that *altus* is the Latin equivalent of ὑψηλός and that Horace is claiming for his *Odes* the 'sublimity' (ὑψος) discussed by Longinus.¹⁷ But the equivalence of the two terms is denied by Brink, who adds correctly that '*altus* in Latin critical terminology is surprisingly rare'.¹⁸ There are a handful of examples of *altus* applied to 'style',¹⁹ one of which is Seneca, *Agam.* 332–3 *modis ... altis*; but, since Tarrant explains this as a reference to the hexameter and explicitly draws a contrast with lyric, this line of approach seems unpromising.²⁰ There are more numerous examples of *altus* as applied to 'thought, studies, enterprises, qualities, etc.' in the senses of 'elevated, noble, lofty';²¹ but this seems scarcely an appropriate description for a collection which includes repeated invitations to sex and drink and which the poet himself elsewhere characterises as 'playthings', the product of a 'light-hearted lyre' (*Hor. Carm.* 3.3.69 *iocosae ... lyrae*; cf. *Epist.* 1.1.10 *ludicra*).²² *altius*, in short, is no more applicable to the *Odes* than it is to the metaphorical *monumentum*.

Although the manuscripts at *Lucr.* 6.357 are unanimous in transmitting *alta*, the poet's evident allusion to an Ennian phrase (*Ann.* 27, 145, 348) means that Turnebus was almost certainly right to emend *alta* to *apta*. At *Aen.* 1.429 the manuscripts again transmit *alta*, but, since the same word appears in the same *sedes* two lines earlier, one of them is likely to be an error; Bentley emended the second *alta* to *apta*, which is printed by Mynors and Austin.²³ That the one adjective can be written mistakenly for the other is shown by the fact that they are variant readings at *Prop.* 3.22.42 and several times in Ovid (*Am.* 3.1.14, *Fast.* 2.216, *Ibis* 212). Is it possible that similar considerations apply in the case of Horace's ode and that he wrote *aptius* rather than *altius*? It is generally agreed that, in addition to an allusion to Simonides, Horace is here alluding also to Pindar, *Pyth.* 6.5–14:

Πυθόνικος ἔνθ' ὀλβίοισιν Ἐμμενίδαις
 ποταμία τ' Ἀκράγαντι καὶ μὲν Ξενοκράτει
 ἐτοῖμος ὕμνων
 θησαυρὸς ἐν πολυχρύσῳ
 Ἀπολλωνία τετείχιστα νάπα·

16 Unfortunately this is not a question which is raised in the standard commentary by Nisbet and Rudd (2004), who render line 2 as 'more conspicuous than the pyramids' (364); the conspicuousness of the tomb is indeed a regular theme in epitaphs (Lattimore (1942) 227), but *altus* does not mean 'conspicuous'.

17 The meaning of ὑψος is not easy to pin down (see Russell (1964) xxx–xlii) and it is not clear how it could be applicable to the *Odes*.

18 Brink (1982) on *Epist.* 2.1.56 *famam senis ... alti*.

19 OLD s.v. 13c.

20 Tarrant (1976) ad loc.

21 OLD s.v. 13b.

22 '*Altius* kann sich nur auf die Höhe, d.h. in übertragenem Sinne die Erhabenheit beziehen' (Korzeniewski (1972) 382).

23 I owe this example to S. J. Heyworth.

τὸν οὐτε χειμέριος ὄμβρος, ἐπακτὸς ἐλθὼν
 ἐριβρόμου νεφέλας
 στρατὸς ἀμείλιχος, οὐτ' ἄνεμος ἐς μυχοῦς
 ἄλδος ἄξιοισι παμφόρῳ χεράδει
 τυπτόμενον.

There ready for the fortunate Emmenidae and for Acragas on its river and for Xenocrates, a Pythian victor's treasure house of hymns has been built in Apollo's valley rich in gold, one which neither winter rain, coming from abroad as a relentless army from a loudly rumbling cloud, nor wind shall buffet and with their deluge of silt carry into the depths of the sea. (trans. W. H. Race, LCL, slightly adapted)

Both poets describe their poetry in terms of a building metaphor, and in both there are a relative clause, double negative, and the pairing of rain and wind. Since Horace's allusion is so clear, it is obviously relevant to note that Pindar describes his 'treasure house' as ἐτοῖμος, with which *aptus* overlaps in meaning. But, whereas in Pindar ἐτοῖμος is constructed with a dative ('ready for ~'), a construction to which *aptus* also commonly lends itself (as at Val. Max. 4.8. ext. 2 *publicis usibus apta monumenta extruebantur*), the meaning of the adjective in the ode would be 'better adapted to its purpose, more appropriate, more apt' (i.e. as a memorial).²⁴ Moreover *aptus*, unlike *altus*, is frequently used in literary criticism and has a wide variety of applications: in particular it is one of the terms used to express the key literary virtue of τὸ πρέπον ('appropriateness').²⁵

Although 'more apt than the royal site of the pyramids' may seem rather a come-down to readers used to finding 'higher' or 'loftier' in their texts,²⁶ this is perhaps to underestimate the significance of the words *regali ... situ*. The necropolis at Giza covered almost a square mile in area and displayed the three vast pyramids for which it was famous (cf. e.g. Strabo 17.1.33, Plin. HN 36.76, Mela 1.55).²⁷ It is beyond question that the site of these pyramids was the ultimate *lieu de mémoire* in the ancient world, but – the ultimate paradox – there was no agreement about which kings the pyramids commemorated, 'since by the most just of fates the authors of such *uanitas* have been forgotten' (Plin. HN 36.79 *inter omnes non constat a quibus factae sint, iustissimo casu oblitteratis tantae uanitatis auctoribus*). *uanitas* means both

24 For this meaning see Pease on Cic. Nat. D. 2.47.

25 Lausberg (1998) 117–18 §§258, 460–4 §§1055–62.

26 Ovid concludes his *Metamorphoses* with an extended imitation of Horace's ode and uses the adjective *altus* (15.875–6 *parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis | astra ferat*), but (a) *alta astra*, which he had used already at 15.147–8, might well have come from Prop. 2.32.50, (b) Ovid is referring not to his poetry but to himself (as did Horace at *Carm.* 1.1.36).

27 The necropolis also includes two sets of three much smaller pyramids, making three triads in all and underlining the significance of the 'magic' number three. Sullivan (2014) has argued that, in referring to the pyramids, Horace has in mind the stacking of ten scrolls in the form of a pyramid; but his argument is fatally flawed, because, as he more or less admits (103 n. 8), scrolls can only be stacked in the form of a triangular prism, not a pyramid.

'foolish pride' and 'futility, pointlessness':²⁸ Horace's *monumentum* is thus even more appropriate than the world's grandest and most famous site of memory, since, despite the challenge constituted by the omission of his name from his 'epitaph',²⁹ the three books of *Odes* will achieve their purpose in ensuring that his fame lives on for ever.

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28 OLD s.v. 2b and 1c.

29 Real-life epitaphs naturally record the name of the deceased, but Horace's death will not be total (lines 6–7) and the nearest he gets to identifying himself in 3.30 is in the allusive reference to Apulia in lines 10–12, which, when combined with the information he provides at 3.4.9–16, is revealed as referring to his birthplace.