

THE ARION PRESS announces

# *The Odes of Horace*

## BOOK II

A new verse translation  
with commentary and an introduction  
by MICHAEL TAYLOR

and twenty-one duotone photographs of sea stones  
by DENNIS LETBETTER

Published at San Francisco  
November 2019

### PROSPECTUS

Horace, one of the greatest poets of ancient Rome, was born in 65 BCE to a freed slave in a parched hinterland of the southern Italian peninsula. That he lived in an age of momentous transition akin to our own is an understatement. When Horace was growing up, Rome was an unstable republic embroiled in internal conflicts; by the time he died in his late seventies, Rome had become a world power. In the interim, thanks to his immense lyric talent and his cultivation of double meaning, the poet became the foremost protégé of the Emperor Augustus's powerful minister, Maecenas.

The four books of the *Odes* are Horace's supreme achievement, representing the poet at the height of his art. In the twenty poems of Book II, he shifts masterfully from breathless love lyrics (which are never as straightforward as they appear to be) to canny confessions and crafty admonitions to the powerful and rich.

Frequently translated, often weakened, the *Odes* have challenged every translator who sought to bridge the distance between the originals and a language very different from anything the poet spoke. Their reputation for difficulty has turned them, all too often, into a classroom headache. Yet the poems represent Horace at his best: highly compressed, full of energy and life, demonstrating unsparing observations of his contemporaries.

Michael Taylor's new translations respond to this vitality. Combining a scrupulous regard for what Horace actually wrote with a feel for the visual and aural texture of contemporary English, Taylor's Horace reaches for the vibrancy behind the classical facade. In these translations, Horace speaks to us with freshness and an astonishing immediacy, more than two thousand years after the *Odes* were composed.

Taylor's translation of Book I of the *Odes* was published by San Francisco's preeminent printer and book designer Jack Stauffacher at the Greenwood Press in 1992. Stauffacher's death in 2017 precluded his completion of the series. To honor Stauffacher's esteemed achievement, the artistry of Taylor's remaining translations, and the legacy of the fine print community in San Francisco, Arion Press has endeavored to continue the publication of these odes with its release of Book II. Adding to the resonance of the project is photographer Dennis Letbetter's relationship with Stauffacher, with whom he collaborated frequently for over thirty years. Most recently, Letbetter oversaw the posthumous publication in 2019 of Stauffacher's final book *Oxen. Plough. Bicycle.* which featured Stauffacher's own luminous photographs of post-war Tuscany.

#### ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHY

The Augustan empire lasted for centuries after the emperor's death in 9 AD. As Taylor notes in his introduction, "it survives today in a sort of fragmentary life-in-death, in vestigial wall decorations, broken mosaics, chipped

funeral inscriptions, smashed columns, stretches of cobbled weed-choked roads, histories and footnotes and odd catch phrases and legal terms; it flickers in Palladian villas and the facades of public institutions and banks whose policies would have impressed even the most unscrupulous of Roman entrepreneurs."

Letbetter's photographs of sea stones are an apt metaphor for this state of things. Letbetter began several photographic series at San Francisco's Ocean Beach after months of studying the ebb and flow of tides, and the flora and fauna found there at edge of the modern western world. Among these, the images of stones were the most abstract and beguiling. They bear witness to an organization of deposited materials, sediments, and a natural agency of sea and wind. Like the *Odes*, they are enigmatic.

Letbetter writes, "Picking up the stones and holding them wet in my hand revealed a lyrical world, as though the whole universe was made available in their lines and shapes, allowing momentarily an access to a child's wonderment and amazement with all of life. Some seem to show celestial bodies, others aerial photographs of the earth, sophisticated Twomblys, Martins, or Pollocks, whimsical images of birds, animals, organic shapes and the majority an infinite variety of abstractions. The stones are runes without ego or intent. Fascinating, alluring, perfect."

Elements of this series have been reproduced at sizes as large as 40 x 60 inches, and the reproductions for this project in duotone inks, black and a medium cool gray, are likewise larger-than-life. Photography is particularly well-suited to allowing access to transcendental considerations of the visual world, reducing landscapes into something that can be handheld, two-dimensional, high contrast, black and white. In this Arion edition, Letbetter's photographs venture comfortably far from literal illustration. The pairing of stone and verse creates a parallel discourse that defies expectation and creates a place where the photograph can be reshaped by the poetry and the poetry reiterated by the photograph. Here the reader will find old words newly voiced, and old stones newly photographed.

#### THE TRANSLATOR

Michael Taylor was born in 1944 in Washington DC and grew up in Paris.

He studied at Dartmouth College and UC Berkeley, from which he holds a PhD in Comparative Literature. While writing his thesis on the poetry of early 20th-century French writer Victor Segalen, he edited the definitive edition in French of Segalen's book-length poem *Thibet*. Taylor's other books include a biography of Segalen, a history of Western travel in Tibet, and a translation of *Stèles*, Segalen's Chinese-inspired poems which Paul Auster hailed as a "flawless job on one of the strangest and most beautiful books" written in the 20th century. Taylor's original book *Rembrandt's Nose* has been translated into French, Spanish, and Russian. He is also the author of a study of Vermeer, focusing on the contrast between the artist's serene images and the violence of his age, and he is currently writing a book on the third giant of the Dutch Golden Age, Frans Hals. From 1999 to 2009 he taught at the University of Versailles and gave classes in critical reading and creative writing at Parsons Paris. He currently lives in southwest France.

#### THE ARTIST

Dennis Letbetter is a widely exhibited photographer who has operated a studio in San Francisco since 1978. Published worldwide, his work has covered many genres: portraiture, still life, the nude, and panoramic cityscapes in America, Russia, South America, Europe, and Japan. From 1995 until 2018 he owned and curated The Bonnafont Gallery in San Francisco, and he is currently publisher and owner of Editions Michel Eyquem. A magazine devoted to his photographic work, *iMag*, is approaching its 19th issue. Other selected publications include: *This Book is an Object*, 1989; *Tulips*, 1992; *The Beams of Montaigne's Library*, 1996; *Jane*, 2000; *Inscriptions*, 2003; *Vico Photographs*, 2003; *The Vico Collaboration*, 2004; *Vico duodecimo Axiom 65*, 2006; *From Shanghai to Wuxi*, 2007; *Toward a Human Face*, 2011; and *Rose, Oser, Sero, Eros*, 2012.

#### THE EDITIONS & THE EXTRA PRINT

The book opens with Taylor's introduction, "The Poet and The Emperor," a vivid reconstruction of Horace's role in Roman society and relationship to his protector, Maecenas. An accompanying *Dramatis Personae* provides a summary of the emperor's inner circle with descriptions of the characters who appear by name in the verse. Each ode is followed by a commentary

elucidating the mythological and historical allusions in the poems, and an index of first lines in Latin is provided as an appendix.

The book is 112 pages printed by letterpress on a Miller two-cylinder press and measures 10- $\frac{1}{8}$  x 6- $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. It contains twenty-one original photographs reproduced by offset lithography as duotones with black and gray inks. The paper is 90 GSM Magnani cream laid, and the text has been set throughout in Jan Van Krimpen's elegant Spectrum—handset and in English Monotype composition cast in lead alloy onsite at the M&H Type foundry—from which the titling logotype has also been constructed. Larger display sizes are printed in a second, purple ink. All copies are signed by both translator and artist.

The limited edition consists of 150 copies for sale and 26 lettered copies *hors commerce*. It is Smyth-sewn and the binding is full linen cloth with a vertical label stamped on pebbled Japanese Shoji chiri with the custom logotype design. It is encased in a cardstock chemise of Tyrian purple, with titling imprinted along the spine.

The deluxe edition is limited to 30 copies for sale and 5 printer's proofs. These books are handsewn with a decorative sewing pattern into Tyrian purple cardstock covers and wrapped, in turn, in soft-cover envelopes of dark granite handmade Cave paper with the custom logotype titling stamped on the front. The books are housed in a custom-fit, linen-covered clamshell box with matching purple cardstock interior linings and recessed cover label.

The deluxe edition includes a limited-edition photograph of a twenty-second sea stone magnificently enlarged onto paper 16 x 20 inches. It is an archivally processed gelatin silver print, hand-printed and signed by Dennis Letbetter, and suitable for framing. This image is not included in the book but can be viewed on the Arion Press website. Although the deluxe edition and the extra photographic print are sold together, the print will ship under separate cover in its own presentation folder documenting its limitation, matched to its accompanying deluxe copy of the book.

#### OVERLEAF

*A sample spread: sea stone photograph in duotone facing the initial stanzas of ode 18.*

18

*to a plutocrat*



No ivory-inlaid  
or gilded ceiling glows above my head,  
no blue-veined Attic marble  
propped by pillars of golden Ethiopian

stone. I have not inherited  
the palace of Attalus.  
No girls of impeccable breeding  
weave a purple toga

for my shoulders. My art is all I own,  
this quicksilver seam of wit,  
me, not rich, whom the rich seek.  
I do not pester the gods

or my friend in power for further largesse.  
This Sabine farm is all I need.  
Day follows day. The new moon  
plumps out and grows thin.

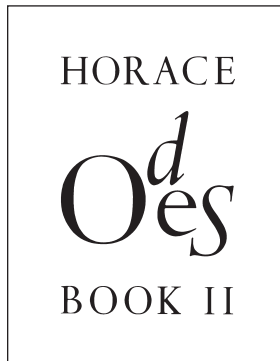
## HOW TO ORDER

Current subscribers will be offered the first opportunity to purchase the deluxe edition with the signed gelatin silver photograph, and three sets have been reserved as an incentive for customers to join our subscription program. Please contact us early for details as these copies will sell quickly. Other customers may add their names to a reservation list.

The subscriber price for the limited edition discounted by 30 per cent is \$595 (\$850 retail).

The deluxe edition is an optional purchase for our subscribers and therefore subject to a 20 per cent discount, amounting to \$2,240 for the set, which includes the book in its clamshell housing and the 16 x 20-inch gelatin silver photograph housed in a separate folder of its own. The retail price for the deluxe edition is \$2,800 for the set.

To reserve your copy or request further information about the subscription program discounts, please contact us at the below address. Arion Press books are on display in the gallery during regular business hours. Tours of the production facilities—including the type foundry, press room, and bookbindery—are held weekly on Thursday afternoons at 3 P.M. Please call in advance to make a reservation.



*This custom logotype design embellishes both limited and deluxe edition bindings.*

## THE ARION PRESS

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