

GREEK LYRIC POETRY



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*slated by Willis Barnstone
with an introduction by
William E. McCulloh*



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Willis Barnstone, poet and Professor of Comparative Literature at Wesleyan University, has presented this unique poetry in English versions which are faithful to the Greek in meaning and spirit, and highly poetic in their own right.



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GREEK LYRIC POETRY

TRANSLATED BY
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WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION AND
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES BY
WILLIAM McCULLOH
KENYON COLLEGE



ΟΡΓΑΝΙΣΜΟΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΙΝΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΡΤΙΣΗΣ

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GREEK LYRIC POETRY

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TO
Helle Phaedra
who led me to Greece
and to my brother
Howard Barnstone

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Contents

Introduction, by William E. McCulloh 1

A Note on Selection and Translation,
by Willis Barnstone 17

THE GREEK PERIOD

Archilochos	23	Ibykos	100
Kallinos	33	Phokylides	103
Semonides	35	Simonides	104
Tyrtaios	38	Lasos of Hermion	112
Mimnermos	40	Apollodoros	113
Solon	43	Timokreon	114
Theognis	47	Lamprokles	115
Stesichoros	51	Telesilla	116
Alkaios	54	Korinna	117
Sappho	63	Pindar (Pindaros)	120
Alkman	83	Bakchylides	124
Anakreon	90	Praxilla	128
Xenophanes	96	Plato (Platon)	129

THE ALEXANDRIAN PERIOD

Kallimachos	137	Moschos	144
Anyte	139	Asklepiades	145
Theokritos	140	Mnasalkas	147
Leonidas of Tarentum	142	Bion	148

THE ROMAN PERIOD

Meleagros	151	Parmenion	160
Philodemos the Epicurean	154	Nikarchos	161
Diodorus	155	Lucilius (Loukillios)	163
Antipater of Thessalonika	156	Leonidas of Alexandria	167
Marcus Argentarius	157	The Emperor Trajan	168
Roufinos	158	Ammianos	169
Apollonides	159	Lucian (Loukianos)	170

CONTENTS

THE BYZANTINE PERIOD

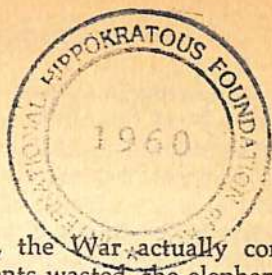
Palladas	173	Paulus Silentarius	176
Julianus, the Prefect of		Agathias	
Egypt	175	Scholastikos	177

ANONYMOUS WORKS OF INDEFINITE PERIOD

Anakreontea	181	Miscellaneous	189
-------------	-----	---------------	-----

Selected Bibliography	193
-----------------------	-----

Introduction



Suppose, in our time, the War actually comes. With no current refinements wasted, the elephantine blasts, fire storms, and fallout finish their appointed tasks. Several decades later the literary archaeologists from Tierra del Fuego and the Samoyedes rake loose from London's heaps part of a volume of literary criticism in which stand, entire, Yeats' lines "My fiftieth year had come and gone"—and the "Second Coming," with a few single lines quoted amid the unknown critic's comments. Then a gutted Pittsburgh mansion yields two charred anonymous sheets of a poem whose style—what can be seen of it—resembles Yeats. A fragmentary dictionary cites, as a rare alternate pronunciation of fanatic: "Fa-na-tic. Thus in W. B. Yeats' 'Remorse for Intemperate Speech.'" There are similar further recoveries, equally scanty. So much for the poet whom T. S. Eliot has called the greatest of the twentieth century.

But this has happened already, in time's glacial cataclysm, to the greatest lyric poet (so men say) of the West before the thirteenth century—to Sappho. And to Archilochos, whom some ancients paired with Homer. And to many others, the Herricks, Donnes, and Herberts of Greece's first lyric flowering. For however much one may take it as unmerited grace that one has at least Homer, at least the iceberg tip of the fifth century and its epigones, one must still question the providence which allowed from the vastly different age between—the Lyric Age of the seventh and sixth centuries¹—only Pindar and the scraps for one small book besides. That uniquely organic outgrowth of successive literary

¹ Thus the title given it by A. R. Burn in *The Lyric Age of Greece* (London, 1960).

INTRODUCTION

styles and forms in Greece—forms which are the ineluctable basis for all Western literature²—is thus desperately mutilated for us in what seems to have been its most explosively diverse and luxuriant phase.

Homer is the culmination of a long and now invisible tradition of heroic poetry which was the literary voice of a monarchical society. His heroes are the archetypal ancestors of the royalty in whose courts the epic lays flourished and whose values the bard celebrated. But, like Bach, he seems to have written in times which had already moved past his own poetic world. The city-state was beginning to displace the tribal monarchy. The conflict between monarchy and aristocracy had begun, and perhaps also that conflict between aristocracy and commons which led to the great tyrannies (somewhat like the dictatorships of our century) and—at least in some cities—to democracy. But most important for poetry, the poet had begun to emerge as an individual speaking for himself, not an impersonal celebrant of ancestral glory and doom.

While the elder Bach composed his *Art of Fugue* "*ad maiorem Dei gloriam*," his sons were breaking the homophonic trail toward the secular divinity of the Beethoven symphony. And within the lifetime of "Homer" (though dates are of course uncertain), Archilochos, the first Western man whom we know as a personality, and the first European lyric poet of whom fragments remain, was fusing and transforming popular and anonymous song and dance into the personal poem. So it is with Archilochos that we must begin, the first historical Western personality, and for us, the impoverished heirs, the inceptor of European lyric.

But here an academic detour is required. What we shall call Greek "lyric" poetry is in fact a cluster of several quite distinct types, each with its own tradi-

² See for example Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (New York, 1957).

INTRODUCTION

tion and development. "Lyric" means literally "accompanied by the lyre," and implies poetry that is sung, not spoken. Now it is likely that all forms of Greek poetry originated in ritual performances which blended word, music, and dance. But in historical times only one branch of that poetry retained all three elements: the choral ode. *Choros*, for the Greeks, meant a performing group which both danced and sang. (Compare "choreography.") *Ôide* meant song. Chorodic poetry, then, remained closer to its ritual origins than did any of the other forms. It was associated with a variety of public ceremonies. Already in Homer one finds most of these mentioned or described.³ There is the *Threnos*, or dirge for the dead (the lament for Hektor, *Iliad* XXIV, 746ff.), which survives today as the requiem mass. There is the *Paian*, or hymn to Apollo (*Iliad* I, 472-4), of which some hymns of Hölderlin and Shelley are modern mutations. Of the *Hymenaios* or wedding song (*Iliad* XVIII, 493), Spenser's "Epithalamion," "O Promise Me," and the charivari are schizoid remnants. And compare the *Hyporchema* or mimetic-narrative dance (*Odyssey* VIII, 261ff.) with *The Seven Deadly Sins* of Weil-Brecht-Balanchine. The *Prosodion*, or processional song (still surviving in some religious services), is not found in Homer. Nor is the dithyramb, originally an intoxicated improvisation in honor of the god of ecstasy, Dionysos. According to Aristotle, though his claim is much disputed,⁴ it was the dithyramb which took on dramatic form and became tragedy. If so, this is the most portentous of all chorodic forms: the whole of European drama is its grandchild.

In the sixth century choral odes came to be written in celebration of human, rather than divine, ex-

³ The classification given here is taken from C. M. Bowra's full discussion in the introduction to his *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, 1936).

⁴ As, for example, in A. W. Pickard-Cambridge's *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927).

INTRODUCTION

cellence. The *Enkômion* praised great men. Victors in the great athletic contests of Greece were honored in the *Epinikion*. For those to whom the decathlon is not a revelation of one of the cardinal excellences of man, it seems offensive that such should have been the occasion for the poetry of Pindar, who has been called "one of the four spiritual reasons for setting ourselves to the toil of mastering the Greek language."⁵

Throughout this apparent wilderness of chorodic types there are three nearly universal common features. First, the language is usually ornate and complex, with some features of the Doric dialect. Second, the typical choral ode (apart from drama) is composed of a series of paired and metrically identical stanzas, with each pair separated from the next by a stanza of similar but not identical metrical character. The pair consists of a strophe and antistrophe, or "turn" and "counter-turn." (These terms are thought to refer to the fact that the dance movements in the second stanza of each pair were exactly reversed from those of the first.) The third, dividing stanza is the epode. The metrical patterns in chorodic poetry are more complex than those of any other Greek poetry—in fact, more complex than any other European poetry except free verse. And the patterns of no two odes are identical. Diversity and regularity, freedom and balance, have never been more perfectly fused.

The third feature common to nearly all choral odes is the material of which the odes consist.⁶ There are moral maxims. (In Pindar these can become abrupt revelations.) Individuals involved in the festival or celebration are mentioned. And—most important for literature—a myth is retold, often, as in Pindar, from a striking viewpoint, with daring ellip-

⁵ Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Works of Pindar* (London, 1930), I, vii.

⁶ Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, Introduction.

INTRODUCTION

ses and compressions in the narrative—the antipode to Homer's way. Alkman's *Partheneion*, the earliest choral ode to survive *in extenso*, exhibits all three of these elements.

There have been modern attempts at close imitation of the Greek choral ode. Among these are the choruses of Swinburne's *Erectheus* and Arnold's *Merope*, Gray's Pindaric odes, and some of the choruses in the Helena section of Goethe's *Faust II*.

With the elimination of the dancing chorus one reaches the second of the two forms of poetry which are, in the Greek sense, genuinely lyric: the solo song, or monody. Monody is much closer to the usual modern lyric in its relative simplicity and its preoccupation with the poet's personal concerns. But ancient monody ranged more widely—into politics and satire, for example—than one would expect of "lyric" poetry. And unlike much modern lyric, the poem is never an utterly private communing of the poet with himself; it is always conceived of as addressed to an audience. The audience here, however, is usually not that of an official public occasion, but a private gathering—of disciples (Sappho), or of companions at a drinking party or *symposion* (Alkaios, Anakreon).

Monodies were composed of a single line or short stanza-pattern repeated throughout the poem. Unlike the choral lyric, the same stanza-pattern could be re-used in many poems, and the types of stanzas were limited. Two of the finest types are the Sapphic (employed by its eponym, for example, in the poems translated by Willis Barnstone under the titles "Prayer to Aphrodite" and "Seizure") and the Alcaic (in which Alkaios's "Winter Evening" and "A Nation at Sea" were written⁷). Some idea of their character may perhaps be grasped in Tennyson's imitations (the second example has been adapted):

⁷ All titles used in this introduction are those given by the translator. The originals are untitled.

INTRODUCTION

Sapphic:

Faded every violet, all the roses;
Gone the promise glorious, and the victim,
Broken in this anger of Aphrodite,
Yields to the victor.

Alcaic:

O mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies,
O skill'd to sing of Time and Eternity,
God-gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton, a name to resound for ages.

Among modern imitations, one of Ezra Pound's earlier poems, "Apparuit," is in Sapphics, and a number of Swinburne's imitate monodic meters. But the one modern who transcended imitation in his use of Greek monodic forms, who has earned a place with Horace for having snatched the lyric club from the Greek Hercules, is Hölderlin.

In addition to poetry accompanied by music there are two further kinds of Greek verse which one to-day might roughly class as lyric. Both may originally have been sung, but early lost their music. Iambic poetry, allegedly the invention of Archilochos, was composed of lines predominantly in iambic or trochaic (the reverse of iambic) rhythms. It was at first chiefly employed, as one can see in Archilochos, Semonides of Amorgos, and Hipponax, for personal abuse, satire, and polemic. But even in Archilochos its range was wider (see for example the fragment "Moderation"). Solon used iambics to defend his political and economic policies at Athens.

The greatest offspring in Greek of iambic poetry was the dialog in Athenian drama. The drama is thus a hybrid of the chorodic and iambic traditions. But it has been further maintained that even Shakespeare's blank verse originally came, by way of Italian Renaissance imitations of ancient drama, from the lines of Archilochos.⁸

⁸ Highet, *Classical Tradition*, p. 131.

INTRODUCTION

Finally, there is the elegiac poetry. Coleridge's adaptation of Schiller gives some idea of its basic unit, the elegiac couplet:

In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery
column;

In the pentameter aye falling in melody back.

The first line, the hexameter, has six feet of dactyls, often replaced in various feet by spondees (two long syllables). The second line, misnamed the "pentameter," is simply a hexameter with the second half of the third and sixth feet silent.

Of all forms of "lyric" verse, the elegiac has had the most nearly continuous existence, from the late eighth century or earlier into modern times. From the beginning it was used for highly diverse purposes.⁹ 1) Like monody, it served to embellish the symposium. There it could speak of love and current political and military affairs, as it does in Kallinos, Mimnermos, and the collection attributed to Theognis. 2) It was used for long military and political harangues, such as those of Tyrtaios and Solon, and for historical narrative. 3) It was used in dedications inscribed on statues and other gifts to the gods. 4) It appeared on epitaphs, the short inscriptions on grave-markers. Simonides's epitaph for the Spartan dead at Thermopylae is the most famous (it was quoted in the 1960 Presidential campaign) of a noble company. 5) The form of the lament, especially in its later hybrid, the pastoral elegy, is the one best known in modern times. (Milton's "*Lycidas*" and "*Epitaphium Damonis*," Gray's "*Elegy*," Shelley's "*Adonais*," Arnold's "*Thyrsis*.")

The elegiac form was transplanted into Latin and grew nobly in the Augustan period under the care of such men as Propertius and Ovid. It struggled bravely

⁹ The categories here are approximately those of Bowra in his article "Elegiac Poetry, Greek," *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1949).

INTRODUCTION

through the Middle Ages until the Renaissance gave it new life, and it survived into the nineteenth century for its finest harvest (apart from its mutation into the English heroic couplet) since the Augustans, in Goethe's *Roman Elegies*, and those of Hölderlin. Since then the couplet form itself has languished. But its spirit passed from Hölderlin into those poems supreme among all which bear the name elegy, the *Duino Elegies* of Rilke.

So much for the forms of Greek lyric and their afterlife. It is time now to return to Archilochos and treat of the temporal phases of lyric. The subject is by nature erratic and fragmentary, and the following brash survey of the principal remains will suffer even more heavily from these defects. For full and proper treatment, the reader should consult the bibliography.

We have seen that the social changes in the late eighth century contributed to the development of the poem as individual expression. But much is owing to the innovating personality of Archilochos himself. Born a bastard, of a Greek father and a Thracian mother, he was an outsider from the start. His life as a free-lance soldier, moreover, intensified his alienation from group traditions. Thus thrown upon himself, he rejected the values of the aristocracy, particularly that supreme aristocratic value, Honor (which at the time was roughly chivalric in character). Honor, to the conventional aristocrat of his age, was something worth dying for, since death was in any case inevitable, and an "honorable" death gave one at least the secular immortality of renown. Says Sarpedon to Glaukos in the *Iliad* (XII, 322ff.), "Man, could we survive this war and live forever, deathless and strong, I would not be fighting out in front, nor would I urge you to this fray which gives us glory. But death in myriad forms is closing in—no mortal can slip past it. Come with me; no matter if another will boast over us, or we over him."

INTRODUCTION

Archilochos, as his fragment "On His Shield" makes clear, chose another way. To throw away one's shield in a hasty retreat was not worse than death. It was simple common sense. What counted was not the deathless fame, but the tangible delights of the present, precious moment. Together with future glory Archilochos discarded the equally impalpable worth of present reputation; it was better to make enemies than to appease. Some would hold that the short fragment here titled "Proverb for a Great Scoundrel" refers in fact to the poet himself. If so, the image of the self-reliant, self-enclosed hedgehog is an apt one for this first on Europe's honorable roll of prickly, renegade poets.

Archilochos' revolution did not of course transform the whole of subsequent poetry. It seems to have been the regions of the Eastern Greeks, the Aeolians and Ionians of Asia Minor and the islands, which proved most receptive to the new spirit. Meanwhile at Sparta, the heart of the younger Western, or Dorian branch of Greek culture, Tyrtaeos was composing martial elegies in which an older communal ethos still lived. The Spartans were the nearest approximation among the Greeks to the collectivist mentality. It is therefore fitting that their gift to the Lyric Age should have been the most collective of forms, the choral ode.

To be sure, as earlier mentioned, the choral ode had existed, in a sense, from the beginning of cult, and thus perhaps ever since the tribal organization of man. But the wealthy patronage of the Spartan state during its years of peaceful abundance, in the later seventh century, attracted talented poets and gave them the means to produce their choruses for the public festivals. Significantly, most of the earlier of these commissioned poets were from the East, the older and subtler culture. The Eastern influence and the years of peace are perhaps the explanation for the un-Spartan playfulness and charm of the first surviving choral poet, Alkman.

INTRODUCTION

Pindar in his full effulgent robes at the thin-aired pinnacle of ancient lyric.

More than a full generation after Sappho comes the next and last personality in ancient monody. Anakreon, again from the East, but this time Ionia, became in popular legend a sort of poetic Silenus: a lovable, drunken, old infatuate. But, somewhat incongruously, this Silenus displays a deft, ironic wit which later imitators (the many anonymous authors of the *Anakreonteia*), playful and delightful as they often are, could not fully reproduce. It is, from our retrospective vantage, hard to believe that readers for centuries could have accepted the *Anakreonteia* as Anakreon's own.

The monodic strand in the Lyric Age comes to an end in a series of anonymous *Skolia* or drinking songs. These *Skolia* are the only native Athenian contribution to the solo ode (and the choral ode, for that matter) of the Lyric Age. Some of them are quite strong and vivid, but one could not guess from them that the fifth century in literature was to belong to Athens.

Three figures close the great period of Greek lyric. All three were choral poets chiefly, and were closely associated through family ties or rivalry. Simonides was uncle of Bakchylides. Pindar strove, sometimes bitterly, with both.

Simonides, eldest of the three, seems in many ways more modern, more a man of the fifth century, than the other two. Such things as his poem in criticism of Kleoboulos and his lecture-poem to Skopas on the limits of mortal virtue reflect a critical, intellectualist strain in Simonides, a readiness to modify received standards not, as with Archilochos, by mere subjective vehemence, but by rational judgement. His short fragment on "Arete" (virtue or excellence) is one of several poems which show a tendency toward dealing with abstract entities rather than traditional mythological divinities.

Like Pindar and Bakchylides, Simonides fre-

INTRODUCTION

quented the mansions of the great where his skills were welcomed and rewarded. But he seems to have given his ultimate sympathies to Athenian democracy, the fifth century's wave of the future. In his style he was celebrated for the controlled, vivid sobriety which can be seen in the long fragment on Danae and Perseus.

Bakchylides, a lesser poet than his uncle, survived in an even more fragmentary state until 1897, when Egyptian sands surrendered a papyrus containing a tolerable proportion of his works. The odes of Bakchylides, as we can now see, are fluent and attractive.

Pindar, who deserves—even in translation—a volume of his own (and has received it in Richmond Lattimore's fine versions), must here be dealt with even more inadequately than all who have gone before. Unlike Simonides, he was not at home in the new currents of the fifth century. Like Homer and Bach, he is the culmination of a tradition—the chorodic—which the times were leaving behind. He was most in his element not at democratic Athens, but in Aigina and Thebes (the chief city of his native Boiotia)—the cultural dinosaurs of the age. Proud, aloof, assured of his genius, and wonderstruck by the brief, god-sent radiance of mortal excellence, he is deservedly the "Theban eagle." For some of those who cleave the knotted oak and swirling ocean of his Greek, there is no greater lyric in the world.

After Pindar there is much that is brilliant, touching, and entertaining in the lyric forms, but the highest energies in Greek literature are now found in drama, history, oratory, and philosophy. There were of course still practitioners of chorody and monody; even Aristotle tried his hand at it and wrought yeomanly. But a new musical style increasingly subdued the text to mere libretto. The predominant form for pure poetry was henceforth the elegiac epigram.

Elegiac poetry and iambic poetry after Archilochos have been left to one side in our review thus far. Most of the significant poets in both *genres* have

INTRODUCTION

been mentioned above in the initial discussion of the forms of Greek lyric. A considerable portion of their work is not lyric in the modern sense and will not be found in this volume. It should be mentioned that a fraction of the poetry of Archilochos and Anakreon is in elegiacs, and that a few iambic lines of Anakreon survive. The elegiac epigrams of Simonides are, next to the work of Theognis, the largest body of elegiac poetry by one man to survive before the third century. Judging from the remains, the epigram, apart from anonymous inscriptions, did not greatly flourish in the latter part of the fifth and in the fourth centuries. The epigrams some think to be Plato's, if in fact they do belong to this period, are the one bright patch in these years.

But in the third century, at the hands of Asklepiades, Kallimachos, and their successors, epigram acquired new range and freshness. The third century, in the scattering wake of Alexander's conquests, was, like ours, apparently inimical to the long poem. (Apollonios of Rhodes then, and Kazantzakis now, are worthy exceptions.) The short, pointed poem, usually in elegiacs—whether erotic, epitaph (real or simulated), satirical, or gnomic—was its most congenial vehicle.

And so it remained for all the succeeding centuries of Greek as an ancient language. Scholars and litterateurs, while Rome was refocussing the world, continued to refine a form which had lost touch with any vital, transforming, outside forces. But frozen as it was, the epigram could still gleam, most brightly in such men as Meleagros, Philodemos, Marcus Argentarius, grim Palladas—and even in the sixth century Byzantine, Paulus Silentiarius. Gathered four times or more in successive collections, the harvest of epigram which is the *Greek Anthology* was stored in roughly its present form by Constantine Cephalàs in the tenth century.

The death which came thus slowly to Greek lyric can come to no other poetry with such apt grace.

INTRODUCTION

For in no other poetry does the conviction of the bitter, lesser glory of man's works live so near the center. (The Roman poet mars his work by hollow boasts of immortality; the later West has Christianity flowing ambiguously in its heart.)

It lives, of course, in another way—as part of the enriching stream from which each new age of poetry draws. "Death by Water" in *The Waste Land* is a form taken from the *Anthology*. Pound writes Sapphic fragments. Salvatore Quasimodo translates the Greek lyricists. And those researchers of atomic rubble, with whom we began, could find a fit Hellenic epitaph for all our troublesome days in Yeats' final lines—words written for his own tomb:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

William E. McCulloh



A Note on Selection and Translation



Fire, water, religions, ignorance and time have treated the lyric poetry of ancient Greece very poorly. Only the waterless sand of Egypt has not inflicted the many sufferings of man on this body of literature: it has merely buried many old papyri, without destroying them. Indeed, there is always hope that the sands of some provincial city will yield a new poem or fragment, such as the recently discovered odes and dithyrambs of Bakchylides.

In what has survived—perhaps one percent of the important lyric poetry—we still have enough to comprise one of man's great achievements in the arts. For we have poems by Sappho, Pindar, Meleagros, Archilochos, Simonides, Plato, Kallimachos, Alkaios, Anakreon and many others. The largest single collections are the victory odes of Pindar and the more than 4,000 poems in the Greek or Palatine Anthology. A very large proportion of Greek lyric poetry survives in exempla quoted in the studies of ancient Greek and Latin scholars.

A line in Greek by Sappho or a two-line epigram by Plato is precious to us in its own right:

WORLD

I could not hope
to touch the sky
with my two arms. (Sappho)

or

I am a sailor's tomb. Beside me lies a farmer.
Hell is the same, under the land and sea. (Plato)

But lines from Greek lyric poetry may also be precious when they are all we have left from which to

A NOTE ON SELECTION AND TRANSLATION

form an image of an ancient poet. Because the number of poems from shorter lyric poetry is so limited, I have translated virtually all the poems from the major lyric poets as well as all the fragments which can stand as independent poems. By considering excellent fragments together with epigrams and longer poems, it may be possible for the first time to read enough lines from poets like Archilochos, Anakreon, Alkaios, Ibykos, Plato, Alkman, to see them in at least clear profile. From Pindar I have translated only a selection of poems and fragments. Pindar's victory odes, a book in themselves, may be read in the fine translations contained in Richmond Lattimore's *The Odes of Pindar*. From the *Greek Anthology* I have tried to make a generous selection of the better poems.

The most formidable problem in translating from Greek has been to find a just approximation of Greek stanza forms and meter. It is at least consoling that there can never be a single true solution for the transfer of prosodiac techniques from one language to another. Poems in Ancient Greek were composed primarily to be sung or recited, to be heard not read. In the original papyrus scripts the words were all run together as in Sanscrit. There were no indentations of shorter lines as in later manuscripts, for the poetic lines were also run together. Only capital letters were used, since lower case letters were not developed until Byzantine times. Thus even the question of whether English lines should begin with upper or lower case letters has no real precedence in the original scripts, and the most faithful translations would use upper case letters exclusively. So, the first stanza of Sappho's poem to Anaktoria might read,

SOMESAYCAVALRYANDSOMEWOULDCL
AIMINFANTRYORAFLEETOFLONGOARSI
STHESUPREMESIGHTONTHEBLACKEART
H.ISAYITISTHEGIRLYOULOVE.

A NOTE ON SELECTION AND TRANSLATION

Even the stanzaic appearance of a Sapphic hymn or a Simonidean epigram as printed traditionally in Greek texts was determined by later Alexandrine scholars on the basis of metrical pauses.

I have tried to give order to these translations in several ways. To approximate the easy conversational flow of many of the Greek poems, I have more often given a syllabic rather than an accentual regularity to the lines. An exception is the longer elegiac poem where the forceful dactyls seemed to me to call for a regular (though free-falling) beat in alternating lines of equal feet. In the matter of diction, it is important to remember that the Greeks, as most poets in the past—a Spenser or Kavafis excepted—wrote in a language which seemed natural and contemporary to their readers.* My intention has been to use a contemporary idiom, generally chaste but colloquial or slangy as the occasion suggests. Until very recently, it has been a uniform practice to impose rhyme on poems translated from Ancient Greek. The Greeks of course did not use end rhyme. Not being limited by this inappropriate device, it has obviously been easier for me to choose words in English which are closer in meaning to the words in Greek. In most of the poems I have tried to retain the stanzaic patterns suggested by the metrical stops in the Greek texts. In others I have been more original, or perhaps perverse, in seeking an equivalent of the Greek.

A word about titles. All the poems included here have titles, yet few of these are traditional in the Greek. Why impose titles then in English translations? Most of the poems and fragments are quotations found in other ancient writings. Though sometimes merely grammatical in nature, the context in which the poem appears usually gives additional information about the complete poem. The titles here are primarily informational, based on contextual in-

* Many later writers did use archaic Homeric words and phrases, but this too was at least natural in common poetic usage.

A NOTE ON SELECTION AND TRANSLATION

formation or on common ancient allusions with which a modern reader may be unfamiliar. Hopefully, titles will serve to replace lengthy footnotes. Then too I should acknowledge that I usually prefer to see a title with a poem, in any language.

Ideally, poetry in translation should one day lead a reader to a reading of the poem in the original tongue. The poem in its native phonemes, we often forget, was primarily a poem, and a good one, presumably, if chosen for translation. My first purpose has been to be faithful to this primary quality of the original—that of its being an effective poem—and so all fidelity to formal considerations is perhaps an afterthought to my first intention—to compose from the Greek a poem in English.

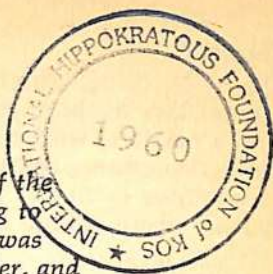
Willis Barnstone



*The
Greek Period*



Archilochos



Lived during the latter half of the eighth century B.C. (according to the most probable view). He was apparently a mercenary soldier, and participated in the colonization of Thasos. When rejected as a suitor of Neoboule, he quarreled bitterly with her father and—according to legend—drove the entire family to suicide with his satire. Archilochos was killed in battle.

The iambus was invented by Archilochos of Paros.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Miscellanies*

Of the three iambic writers in Aristarchos' canon, the one who achieves the greatest mastery is Archilochos. We find in him the most developed sense of expression, with terse and vigorous phrasing, and abundance of blood and muscle.

QUINTILIAN, *Guide to Oratory*

I would shun the poisonous tooth of slander. Though removed in time, I have seen the cantankerous Archilochos in poverty because he fattened on the abuse of enemies.

PINDAR, *Pythian Ode 2*

In this grave lies Archilochos whom the Muses guided to the writing of furious iambics to preserve the supremacy of Homer's dactyls.

ADRIANOS, *Palatine Anthology*

THE GREEK PERIOD

THASOS

This wheatless island
stands like a donkey's back. It bristles
with a tangle of wild woodland. Oh,
there is no country so beautiful,
no luxurious earth that draws my passion
as these plains around the river Siris.

AN ISLAND IN THE NORTH AEGAIAN

All, O all the catastrophies of all the Hellenes
are set loose on this battle ground in Thasos.

THE DOUBLE-CROSS

Let brawling waves beat his ship
against the shore, and have the mop-haired
Thracians
take him naked at Salmydessos,
and he will suffer a thousand calamities
as he chews the bread of slaves.
His body will stiffen in freezing surf
as he wrestles with slimy seaweed,
and his teeth will rattle like a helpless dog,
flopped on his belly in the surge,
puking out the brine. Let me watch him grovel
in mud—for the wrong he did me:
as a traitor he trampled on our good faith,
he who was once my comrade.

PAROS FIGS

Say goodbye to the island Paros,
farewell to its figs and the seafaring life.

THE THREAT

Let the stone of Tantalos
no longer overhang this island.

THE GREEK PERIOD

WAR

Look, Glaukos, how heavy seawaves leap skyward!
Over the Gyrai rocks lying off the island Mykonos
hangs a black cloud, a signal of winter storm.
From the unforeseen comes fear.

A VESSEL OF WINE

Go now with your cup along the timber benches
of our roaming ship, and drain the hollow casks
of all their red wine. We can't stay sober
on the watch, no more than other men tonight.

A DROWNING

They laid down their lives
in the arms of the waves.

SHIPWRECK

The vessel wavered on the cutting edge
between the storm-winds and the waves.

PRAYER AT SEA

Often, when their vessel was threatened by the
gray salty sea,
they prayed to Athene of the lovely braids for
sweet return.

ON FRIENDS LOST AT SEA

If you irritate the wound, Perikles, no man
in our city will enjoy the festivities.
These men were washed under by the thudding
seawaves,
and the hearts in our chest are swollen with pain.
Yet against this incurable misery, the gods
give us the harsh medicine of endurance.
Sorrows come and go, friend, and now they strike us
and we look with horror on the bleeding sores,
yet tomorrow others will mourn the dead. I tell you,
hold back your feminine tears and endure.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON THE LACK OF PROPER BURNING AND BURIAL FOR HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW WHO WAS SHIPWRECKED

If only his head and handsome limbs
had been wrapped in white burial cloth
and touched by Hephaistos' hand of fire.

AN ECLIPSE OF THE SUN

Nothing in the world can surprise me now. Nothing
is impossible or too wonderful, for Zeus, father
of the Olympians, has turned midday into black
night

by shielding the light from the blossoming sun,
and now dark terror hangs over mankind.

Anything
may happen, so do not be amazed if the beasts
of the dry land seek pasture with the dolphins in
the ocean, and those beasts who loved sunny hills
love crashing seawaves more than the warm
mainland.

DAWN

Dawn was rising full white.

GIRL

A spray of myrtle and beauty of a rose
were happiness in her hands, and her hair
fell as darkness on her back and shoulders.

ON PASIPHILE, A FRIEND OF ALL

As the figtree on its rock feeds many crows,
so this simple girl sleeps with strangers.

SUDDEN LOVE

And to fall upon her heaving belly,
and thrust your groin into her groin,
your thighs between her thighs.

THE GREEK PERIOD

LAMENT

Feeble now are the muscles in my mushroom.

QUALITIES OF A GIRLFRIEND

She is a common woman for rent,
but what sensuality and fat ankles,
O harlot, O fat whore for hire!

RICHES

Enormous was the gold that he amassed
from the labor of many years. And all he
poured into the womanly arms of a harlot.

PROVIDENCE

Let the gods take care of everything. Many times
they resurrect a man whom disaster left lying
face down on the black earth. Many times they
topple
a man and pin him, back to the soil, though he
was solid on his feet. A multitude of evils
descends on him, as he wanders hungry and mad.

ON DEAD ANIMALS

Many of them, I hope, will be dried up
by the sharp rays of the Sun in its zenith,
by the Sun in the time of the Dog Star.

PROVERB FOR A GREAT SCOUNDREL

The fox knows many tricks,
the hedgehog only one. A good one.

HIS TWO VIRTUES

I am a servant of the kingly war-god Enylios
and am also skilled in the lovely arts.

WINE OF NAXOS IS LIKE NECTAR BUT HIS JAVELIN IS MUCH MORE

My javelin is good white bread and Ismarian wine.
When I find rest on my javelin I drink wine.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON THE SHORT-HAIRED WARRIORS IN THE
LELANTINE WAR BETWEEN CHALKIS AND
ERETRIA WHO AGREED NOT TO USE MISSILE
WEAPONS

Perhaps fewer bows will be stretched and slings
hurled
when Ares begins battle on the noisy plain,
but then the mournful labor of the sword is worse.

This is warfare in which the spear-famed islanders
from Euboia are godlike and easily masterful.

APHRODITE IS CENSURED

Passionate love relentlessly twists a cord
under my heart and spreads deep mist on my eyes,
stealing the unguarded brains from my head.

ON HIS SHIELD

Well, what if some barbaric Thracian glories
in the perfect shield I left under a bush?
I was sorry to leave it—but I saved my skin.
Does it matter? O hell, I'll get a better one.

MY GENERAL

I don't like a towering, pillar-limbed general,
lordly with elegant locks and trim mustachios.
Give me a stumpy bear-chested man—bowlegged
yet rockfirm on his feet—and giant in his heart.

CHARON THE CARPENTER

The gold booty of Cyris means nothing to me.
I don't envy this Lydian king; am not jealous
of the gods' achievements or of unlimited
tyranny. These are things beyond my vision.

MERCENARY FRIENDSHIP

Glaukos, soldier of fortune, will be your friend
until he begins to fight.

THE GREEK PERIOD

WEDDING DEDICATION

When Alkibia became a married woman, she gave
the holy veil of her hair to queen Hera.

ON THE DAUGHTER OF LYKAMBES

I pray for one gift: that I might merely touch
Neoboule's hand.

LOVE

I live here miserable and broken with desire,
pierced through to the bones by the bitterness
of this god-given painful love.

O comrade, this passion makes my limbs limp
and tramples over me.

THIRST

I want to fight you
just as when I am thirsty I want to drink.

ON A HANGING

They hung their heads to one side, choking,
and disgorged their remaining arrogance.

QUALITY IN LOVE

How can I like the way she makes love?
Give me sweet figs before sour wild pears.

OLD AGE

A life of doing nothing is good for old men,
especially if they are simple in their ways,
or stupid, or inane in their endless blabber
as old men tend to be.

PERIKLES, THE GUEST

Like the Mykonians, Perikles,
you drink our unmixed wine
and pay for nothing.

THE GREEK PERIOD

You broke into this party, uninvited, and act
among old friends.

Your stomach has tricked the brains in your skull
and now makes you shameless.

ON WRONG-DOERS

One big thing I understand:
I know how to spit back with black venom
against the man who wrongs me.

ON THE PEOPLE'S CENSURE

No man, Aisimides, who bows to the mud-slinging
mob has ever been capable of profound pleasures.

THE ROBE

Your telltale robe is bulging, wretched female,
and the men you love sit beside you.
The ditch-digger is in on your little story
and so is your husband Ariphantos.
Lucky Ariphantos didn't catch the fumes
of that stinking billy-goat thief,
for while he was staving off Aischylides, the potter,
the digger dug out your cherry,
and now your swollen belly tells the tale.

AFTER THE DROWNING OF HIS SISTER'S HUSBAND

Now, I have no desire for poetry or joy,
yet I will make nothing better by crying,
nor worse by seeking good foods and pleasure.

MODERATION

O my soul, my soul—you are mutilated helplessly
by this blade of sorrow. Yet rise and bare your chest,
face those who would attack you, be strong, give no
ground.
And if you defeat them, do not brag like a loud-
mouth,

THE GREEK PERIOD

nor, if they beat you, run home and lie down to cry.
Keep some measure in your joy—or in your sadness
during
crisis. So you will understand man's up-and-down
life.

ON THE DEATH OF TWO FRIENDS

Broad earth, now you entomb Megatimos and Aris-
tophon
who were the two tall columns of this island
Naxos.

ON A LEWD SERVANT

And wandering about the household
was that hateful chattering eunuch.

PERIKLES TO ELPINIKE

Lady, you are much too old
to rub yourself with perfume.

AN ANIMAL APPEALS TO ZEUS

Zeus, O father Zeus who controls the cosmos,
you oversee the actions of man,
his criminal and lawful acts; you also judge
the arrogance and trial of wild beasts.

JUSTICE

My lord Apollo, single out the guilty ones,
and in your customary way, destroy them all.

PERFUME

Her breasts and her dark hair
were perfume—and even an old man would love her.

TO A GIRLFRIEND'S FATHER

Father Lykambes, what is this new silliness?
Are your natural brains

THE GREEK PERIOD

gone wholly bad? The neighbors laugh openly
at your absurd life,
and you persist in chattering like a cricket.

ON DROWNED BODIES

Let us hide the dreadful
gifts of lord Poseidon.

DEATH

When dead, no man finds respect or glory
from his countrymen. Rather, while alive
we hope for some favor from the living.
The dead receive the worst.



Kallinos

Active during the first half of the seventh century B.C. He lived at Ephesos in Asia Minor at the time of the Cimmerian incursions.

Semonides is a contemporary of Archilochos, and Kallinos comes a little earlier.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Miscellanies*

(On Elegy) Among the best writers in this meter Proklos includes Kallinos of Ephesos,* Mimnermos of Kolophon, and also Philetas the son of Telephos, from Kos, and Kallimachos the son of Battos.

PHOTIOS, *Library*



A CALL TO ARMS AGAINST THE CIMMERIAN INVADERS

When will you show some courage, young comrades?
How long will you lie back and do nothing?
Lazing in shabby peace on our land bled by war,
Have you no shame before the neighboring towns-
men?

Let each man hurl his spear once more before he
dies,
For glory dazzles on our helmets when we battle
the enemy for farmland and children and true wife.
Death will come only when the web of destiny
is spun.

* Kallinos was the earliest Greek elegiac poet.

THE GREEK PERIOD

So move out, charge into the barbarous ranks
with spear held high and shield gripping a brave
heart.

From death there is no escape; all men face the
dark,
even those with the blood of gods in their veins.

Often a man flees from the clash and thud of spears
and comes home to fall into sudden doom,
but he is neither loved nor missed by the people.

Yet when a hero dies the great and small shed tears;
by a whole people a brave warrior is mourned.
In life he seems a demigod before the crowd;
as a marble pillar they look upon his strength,
for alone he does the great deeds of an army.

TO ZEUS

Pity the people of Smyrna,
and remember if on one day
they ever burned for you
the beautiful thighs of oxen.





Semonides

Of Amorgos in the Aegean, is believed to have lived during the late seventh century.

Amorgos is one of the Sporades islands and was the home of the iambic poet Semonides.

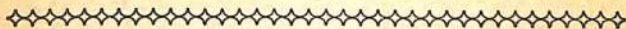
STRABO, *Geography*

Semonides, son of Krines, from Amorgos, writer of iambic verse. Originally he was from Samos but during the colonization of Amorgos he was sent by the Samians as a leader. He built three cities in Amorgos: Minoa, Aigialos and Arkesime. He lived 390 years after the Trojan War. According to some, he was the first to write iambic verse, and he wrote the *History of the Samians* in two books of elegiac verse, and other diverse poetry.

SUIDAS, *Lexicon*

I know that you have lived a thousand things worthy of iambic satire, and so bad that even Archilochos himself could not stand to write about even one of your outrageous acts, even if he called in as collaborators Hipponax and Semonides.

LUCIAN, *The Liar*



THE DARKNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

My child, deep-thundering Zeus controls the end of all that is, disposing as he wills.
We who are mortals have no mind; we live like cattle,

THE GREEK PERIOD

day to day, knowing nothing of god's plans
to end each one of us. Yet we are fed
by hope and faith to dream impossible plans.
Some wait for a day to come, others watch
the turning of years. No one among the mortals
feels so broken as not to hope in coming time
to fly home rich to splendid goods and lands.
Yet before he makes his goal, odious old age
lays hold of him first. Appalling disease
consumes another. Some are killed in war
where death carries them under the dark earth.
Some drown and die under the myriad waves
when a hurricane slams across the blue salt water
cracking their cargo ship. Others rope a noose
around their wretched necks and choose to die,
abandoning the sun of day. A thousand black spirits
waylay man with countless grief and suffering.
If you listen to my counsel, you won't want
the good things of life; nor batter your heart
by torturing your brains with chilling sorrows.

LIFE AND DEATH

Later we will have a long time to lie dead
yet the few years we have now we live badly.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD

If we were sensible we would not spend
more than a day of sorrow for the dead.

ON MATRIMONY

Man gets nothing brighter than a kind wife
and nothing more chilling than a bad hag.

BREVITY OF LIFE*

One verse by the blind poet of Chios is indelible:
"The life of man is like a summer's leaf."

Yet few who hear these words take them into their
heart,

* Ascribed by Edwards to Simonides. The "blind poet" is Homer.

THE GREEK PERIOD

for hope is rooted in every youthful soul,
and while the lovely flower of youth grows tall with
color,
one thinks lightly that life will have no end.

And so, there is no place for growing old, for death;
and while in health, no fear of foul disease.

Pathetic fools! living in islands of illusion,
for men have but a day of youth and life.

You few who understand, know that when death is
near

the food you give your soul must be supreme.





Tyrtaios

Active in Sparta during the late seventh century.

The Spartans swore that they would take Messene or die themselves. When the oracle told them to take an Athenian general, they chose Tyrtaios, the lame poet, who rekindled their courage, and he took Messene in the twentieth year of the war.

SUIDAS, *Lexicon*

And Philochoros says that when the Spartans overpowered the Messenians through the generalship of Tyrtaios, they made it a custom of their military expeditions that after the evening meal when the paean had been sung each man would sing a poem by Tyrtaios, and the leader would judge the singing and give the winner a prize of meat.

ATHENAIOS, *Doctors at Dinner*

SPARTAN SOLDIER

It is beautiful when a brave man of the front ranks falls and dies, battling for his homeland, and ghastly when a man flees planted fields and city and wanders begging with his dear mother, ageing father, little children and true wife.

He will be scorned in every new village, reduced to want and loathsome poverty; and shame will brand his family line, his noble figure. Derision and disaster will hound him.

THE GREEK PERIOD

A turncoat gets no respect or pity;
so let us battle for our country and freely give
our lives to save our darling children.
Young men, fight shield to shield and never succumb
to panic or miserable flight,
but steel the heart in your chests with magnificence
and courage. Forget your own life
when you grapple with the enemy. Never run
and let an old soldier collapse
whose legs have lost their power. It is shocking when
an old man lies on the front line
before a youth: an old warrior whose head is white
and beard gray, exhaling his strong soul
into the dust, clutching his bloody genitals
in his hands: an abominable vision,
foul to see: his flesh naked. But in a young man
all is beautiful when he still
possesses the shining flower of lovely youth.
Alive, he is adored by men,
desired by women, and finest to look upon
when he falls dead in the forward clash.
Let each man spread his legs, rooting them in the
ground,
bite his teeth into his lips, and hold.

FRONTIERS

You should reach the limits of virtue
before you cross the border of death.



Mimnermos



*Lived in Colophon,
Asia Minor, during the late
seventh century.*

Mimnermos discovered the sweet sound
and soft breath of iambic pentameter,
after much suffering. He loved Nanno
... reveled with Examyces, and irritated
the oppressive Hermobios and hostile
Pherekles because he hated their
verse.

HERMESIANAX IN PHOTIUS, *Library*

If as Mimnermos says, there is not
joy without love and play, then you
should live with love and play.

HORACE, *Epistles*

CENSURE OF AGE

What good is life when golden love is gone?
Frankly, I would rather be dead than ignore
a girl's warm surrender, her soft arms at night
in bed: lovely flower of youth that all women
and men desire.

When old age comes
a man feels feeble and ugly and crawls under
a crushing sorrow.

He loses the simple joy
of looking at the sun.
Children despise him.
He is repulsive to young women—in this sad
blind alley which God has made of old age.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TIME

When a man's good hour is past—
although he once shone among mortals—
he is neither honored nor loved.
Not even his own children favor him.

NOW

Be young, dear soul. Soon others will be men
and I being dead will be black earth.

A PLEDGE

Between us, dear friend,
let there always be truth,
most just of all things.

FOR THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Jason went to the city of King Aietes
where the Sun's swift rays are stored
in a gold chamber by the Ocean's lips.

REFUGE AGAINST TALK

Be happy in your own soul. Among pitiless towns-
men
one will always abuse you, another speak praise.

A WARRIOR OF THE LYDIAN WARS

No man could match his strength or heroic heart,
so the elders told me who had seen him
cutting through the phalanx of massed Lydian
cavalry,
swinging his ashwood spear on the plain
of Hermos. Pallas Athene could find no fault
with the stinging courage in his heart
when he plunged first-line into the bloody clash
rushing through the rain of bitter shafts.
No man ever battled more bravely than he
when he darted forward like a ray of sun.

THE GREEK PERIOD

HELIOS AT NIGHT

The Sun works every day and there's no rest
for him or for his horses once
the rose-fingered Dawn leaves the Ocean waters
and begins to scale the firmament.
For with night the Sun is swept across the waves
in a hollow cup of gleaming gold,
a wondrous bed with wings, forged by Hephaistos;
it speeds him sleeping over salt foam
from the Hesperides to the Ethiopian desert.
There his fleet chariot and horses wait
until Dawn comes, the early child of morning.

EXPECTATION

Like fragile shoots in the polyflowered spring
growing quickly in amazing sun,
we love the blossom of youth for a brief season
knowing nothing from gods of evil
or good. Yet near us loom black Keres,* and
painful old age, or worse, death.
The fruit-tree of our life ripens as swiftly as
morning sun rises. But our brilliance gone,
we are soon better dead than alive. Our heart
is torn or home is dark with poverty.
One man longs for a son and goes down childless
into Hell; another shrivels in murderous
disease. No man on earth eludes the net
of unending sorrows sent us by Zeus.

EXPEDITION

We left the craggy city of Neleian Pylos
and came on ship to the beautiful Asia
and lovely Kolophon our base.
There we brashly mustered our immense army
in dreadful pride,
and set out along the river flowing inside
the forest.
Aided by the gods
we captured the Aiolian city of Smyrna.

* *death spirits*

Solon

Lived 640/35 to about 560 B.C.
This famous law-giver was appointed at Athens to settle the strife between the nobility and the landless poor. By his own testimony he pleased neither side, and the conflict ended in victory for Peisistratos, tyrant and nominal champion of the poor. But many of his reforms persisted, and his sober, emphatic, didactic poems on politics and morality became the earliest surviving Athenian literature.

It seems that the three most democratic aspects of Solon's rule were: first and greatest, the prohibition of loans on the person; second, the right of redress for those who were wronged; third, the right of appeal to courts of law, which more than all else strengthened the people. Once master of the vote, the people became master of the constitution.

ARISTOTLE, *Constitution of Athens*

He died in Cyprus at the age of eighty. He left orders with his family to have his bones taken to Salamis and there burn them to ashes and scatter them over the soil.

DIOGENES LAERTIOS, *Life of Solon*

And when Kroisos (Croesus) stood on the pyre, in such an evil moment, it is said that he remembered how truly inspired was Solon's saying that no mortal is happy.

HERODOTOS, *Histories*



APOLOGIA OF HIS RULE

Where did I fail? When did I give up goals
for which I gathered my torn people together?
When the judgment of time descends on me,
call on my prime witness, Black Earth, supreme
excellent mother of the Olympian gods,
whose expanse was once pocked with mortgage
stones,
which I dug out to free a soil in bondage.

Into our home, Athens, founded by the gods,
I brought back many sold unlawfully as slaves,
and throngs of debtors harried into exile,
drifting about so long in foreign lands
they could no longer use our Attic tongue;
here at home men who wore the shameful brand
of slavery and suffered the hideous moods
of brutal masters—all these I freed. Fusing
justice and power into an iron weapon,
I forced through every measure I had pledged.
I wrote the laws for good and bad alike,
and gave an upright posture to our courts.

Had someone else controlled the whip of power,
a bungler, a man of greed, he would not
have held the people in. Had I agreed
to do what satisfied opponents, or else
what their enemies planned in turn for them,
our dear city would be widowed of her men.
But I put myself on guard at every side,
spinning like a wolf among a pack of dogs.

CIVIL WAR IN ATTIKA

I know it, and sorrow lives in my heart
that the oldest land of Ionia is burning.

THE SIGNS OF DICTATORSHIP

The power of hail and snow springs from a cloud,
and thunder from the fire of lightning.

THE GREEK PERIOD

Strong men destroy a city, and a tyrant
enslaves a people through their ignorance.
Once out of port, it is hard to force one back.
Know this now, before it's too late.

TO PHOKOS

On his Refusal to Assume Dictatorial
Powers from which there is no Retreat

If I have spared my country
by not descending into tyranny and unrelenting
violence;
if I have not piled odious dung on my good name,
I am unashamed.
No, I contend that my policy
won far greater victories with the common man.

INDIFFERENCE TO WEALTH

Vast silver, gold, wheatlands, horses, mules,
these only equal the wealth of him
who feels warmth in his stomach, ribs and feet,
and has no more—but enters love
with men or women when he comes upon
the proper season in his youth.
This is plenitude for man. No one descends
to Hell with fabulous belongings.
Even a ransom will not spare him appalling
disease, evil, old age, and death.

VIRTUE AMONG THE POOR

Many malicious men are rich. Many good men
suffer through poverty. Yet who would trade
virtue for gold? While the name of virtue endures
money drops from hand to hand, lasting little.

SOLON BEFORE THE CROWDS IN ATHENS

I am a herald from lovely Salamis. In place
of talk I bring a song: an ornament of words.

THE GREEK PERIOD

A CITY OF TEN THOUSAND IN TEARS

May I meet death without tears. But let my death
bring sorrow and mourning to my friends.

LESSON IN CITIZENSHIP

You must obey the law of the land,
whether you think it right or wrong.

THE EROTIC MAN

In the tender flower of youth he loves a boy,
desiring his thighs and delicious mouth.

THE GODS

The mind of the eternal gods
can not be seen by man.

MORTAL MAN

No mortal is happy, and all men on earth
who look upon the sun are wretched.



Theognis



Of Megara, lived in the late sixth century. He survives in a manuscript of his own, but a vast majority of the lines appear to be of doubtful authorship.

We also have a witness in the poet Theognis, a citizen of Megara, Sicily, who said: "In a difficult dispute, a trustworthy man is equal to gold and silver."

PLATO, *Laws*

Theognis wrote exhortations; but scattered among them were disgusting, pederastic love poems and pieces repugnant to a virtuous life.

SUIDAS, *Lexicon*

This poet is concerned with no other matter than the virtues and vices of man, and his poetry is a study of man just as a treatise on horsemanship written by an expert horseman studies horses.

STOBAIOS, *Anthology*

The epic verse of Empedokles and Parmenides, the *Theriaka* (*Venomous Bites*) and the *Gnomologies* of Theognis are prose works which borrow from poetry the use of its meter and high tone, as if it were a carriage, to avoid going prosaically on foot.

PLUTARCH, *How the Young should listen to Poetry*

THE GREEK PERIOD

SHADOWS

Fools and children you are, mankind! You mourn
the dead and not the dying flower of youth.

EUGENICS

In breeding donkeys, rams, or horses, we seek out
the thoroughbred to get a good strain,
my Kyrnos. Yet now the noblest man will marry
the lowest daughter of a base family,
if only she brings in money. And a lady
will share her bed with a foul rich man,
preferring gold to pedigree. Money is all.
Good breed with bad, and race is lost
to riches. Don't wonder our city's blood is polluted
when noble men will couple with upstarts.

LIBERATION

Death, friend Kyrnos, is better to the poor
than a life cursed with painful poverty.

POVERTY

Nothing destroys a good man quicker than poverty:
not malarial fever, Kyrnos, nor old age.
Better to hurl oneself into the abysmal sea
or over a blunt cliff—than be a victim
of poverty. The poor man can do or say nothing
worthwhile. Even his mouth is gagged.

A LOOSE VESSEL

A ripe young wife and an old husband
make a very sad conjunction.
She is like a ship. Her wild rudder
doesn't respond to him.
Her anchors don't hold.
Often she slips her moorings altogether
to enter at night in another port.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TO KYRNOS, A REPROACH

I gave you wings to fly, looming high and easy
over unboarded sea and the entire earth.
At every meal and banquet you will be present
on the lips of guests. Graceful young men
will sing of you in limpid lovely notes
to the clean piping of the flutes.
When you go under the dark vaults of earth
to the mournful chambers of sad Hell,
even when you lie dead you will not lose
your glory. Your name will be recalled
among men always, Kyrnos. You will wheel high
over the mainland and Greek islands
and cross the unharvested sea pulsing with fish,
not by horse, but carried to those who love you
in the gifts of Muses capped in violet flowers.
You will be like a song to the living
as long as there is sun, earth. Yet you ignore me
and trick me as if I were a child.

A SEAMAN'S SORROW

I heard the sharp cry of the bird, O son of Polypas,
who came to men with the message to plow
in good season; and she wounded my heart black
that others own my flowering lands
and not for me are the mules dragging the curved
plow,
now, in my exile, on the wretched sea.

WORDS OF A BEARDED MAN RECLINING ON A COUCH

O beautiful boy, I crave you more than any man.
Stand where you are and hear my few words.

GOOD WILL WASTED

I knew it before and know it better now:
don't wait for thanks from the lower classes.

THE GREEK PERIOD

HIS FAIRNESS

I will blame no enemy who is a good man
nor praise a friend who may be vile.

OUR COURSE

Best of all things—is never to be born,
never to know the light of sharp sun.
But being born, then best
to pass quickly as one can through the gates of Hell,
and there lie under the massive shield of earth.

THE WANDERER

I have spent long days in the land of Sicily, and
walked
through the vineyards of the Euboian plain;
saw the city of Sparta shining by the reedy Eurotas.
Everywhere people took me into their homes
yet my heart found no pleasure in foreign kindness.
No place is as precious as one's homeland.

THE ATHLETE

Blessed is the man who knows how to make love
as one wrestles in a gym,
and then goes home happy to sleep the day
with a delicious young boy.

GOOD AND EVIL

Easier to make bad out of good than good out of bad.
Don't try to teach me. I am too old to learn.

A CITY IN TRAVAIL

Kyros, the city is pregnant, and I fear it will bear
a man who will clean up our outrageous pride.
The people are still well behaved, but the leaders
plunge along a course of vile corruption.





Stesichoros

Born about 630 B.C., probably in Italy, but mainly active in Sicily. Legend has it that he was blinded by Helen (who had come to be regarded as half-goddess) for telling the usual scandalous story about her, but regained his sight by writing his Palinode, in which Helen does not go to Troy. He died about 555.

Works: twenty-six books, mostly long choral narratives on such themes as the Kalydonian boar-hunt, the sack of Troy, and the Oresteia. Dialect: the mild Doric conventionally employed in choral poetry.

There is a story that while Socrates was in prison, awaiting his death, he heard a man sing skillfully a song by the lyric poet Stesichoros, and begged him to teach it to him before it was too late, and when the musician asked why, Socrates replied, "I want to die knowing one thing more."

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS



ON THE ILIAD

The white-horsed myth.

THE GREEK PERIOD

RECANTATION TO HELEN*

I spoke nonsense and I begin again:

The story is not true.
You never sailed on a benched ship.
You never entered the city of Troy.

ON KLYTAIMNESTRA

*Foreseeing the end of
the Aegisthos line.*

She dreamed that a serpent appeared
with blood-dripping scales,
and from his belly stepped a king
from the ancient dynasty
of Pleisthenes and Agamemnon.

ON THE MARRIAGE OF HELEN AND MENELAOS

Many quince apples were cast upon the chariot
of the king,
many leaves of myrtle,
hundreds of roses and thousands of braided violets.

ON THE MARRIAGE OF ADMETOS AND ALKESTIS

Bring your virgin's dowry
cakes of every kind—sesame, groats, sweet oil—
and bring yellow honey too.

BIRTHPLACE OF EURYTION

Eurytion was born in famous Erytheia
in the hollow of a rock,
near the inexhaustible silver-rooted springs
of the river Tartessos.

* According to Plato in the *Phaedros*, when Stesichoros was blinded for having slandered Helen, he, unlike Homer who was blinded for the same sin, wrote a *Palinode*, a recantation, and immediately recovered his sight.

THE GREEK PERIOD

HERAKLES' QUEST OF THE GERYON CATTLE

Then the sungod Helios, child of Hyperion,
soared in his gold-flashing bowl above the Ocean
and entered the depths of black holy night,
seeking his mother, young wife and darling children.

But crossing the land on foot was Herakles, son of
Zeus,
on his mission through the shadowy laurel grove.

A KING'S PUNISHMENT

On the day of sacrifice,
Tyndareos remembered all the gods but one:
The gift-giving Cyprian;
and in her rage the queen of love
made his daughters marry two times
and three times,
made them walk out on their husbands.

ON SONG AND LAMENT

Apollo loves happy play and cadenced singing
but he leaves groans and mourning to Hades.

Yet how futile even to weep for the dead—
for when dead, a man's glory dies among men.

SEASON OF SONG

Forget the wars.
It is time to sing.
Take out the flute from Phrygia
and recall the songs of our blond Graces.

With the clamor of babbling swallows
it is already spring.





Alkaios

Born about 620 B.C. on Lesbos. As a conservative aristocrat he spent much of his life in conflict with a succession of tyrants. During exile he travelled to Egypt and Thrace but was allowed to return home in 580.

Alkaios' works consisted of at least ten books, mostly monodic. Hymns, political, erotic and sympotic poems predominate. Dialect: Aiolic.

- Alkaios is rightly awarded the golden quill in that part of his work where he assails tyrants; his ethical value is also great; his style is concise, magnificent, exact, very much like Homer's; but he stoops to humor and love when better suited for higher themes.

QUINTILIAN

Reply to Alkaios

If you cared for the good and beautiful and your tongue were not concealing evil, shame would not harbor in your eyes. You would speak out your real feelings.

SAPPHO



INSTANT

I already hear the flowering spring.

THE GREEK PERIOD

PRAYER TO THE CONSTELLATION DIOSCURI PATRON DEITIES OF MARINERS

Come with me now and leave the land of
Pelops, mighty sons of Zeus and Leda,
and in kindness spread your light on us,
Kastor and Polydeukes.

You who wander above the wide earth
and over all the seas on swift horses,
easily delivering mariners
from pitiful death,

Fly to the masthead of our swift ship,
and gazing over foremast and forestays,
light a clear path through the midnight gloom
for our black vessel.

WINTER EVENING

Zeus rumbles and a mammoth winter of snow
pours from the sky; agile rivers are ice.

Damn the winter cold! Pile up the burning logs
and water the great flagons of red wine;
place feather pillows by your head, and drink.

Let us not brood about hard times. Bacchos,
our solace is in you and your red wines:
our medicine of grape. Drink deeply, drink.

SUMMER STAR

Wash your gullet with wine for the dog-star returns
with the heat of summer searing a thirsting earth.
Cicadas cry softly under high leaves, and pour down
shrill song incessantly from under their wings.
The artichoke blooms, and women are warm and
wanton—
but men turn lean and limp for the burning dog-star
parches their brains and knees.

THE GREEK PERIOD

WHY WAIT FOR THE LIGHTING OF THE LAMPS?

Let us drink. Why wait for the lighting of the lamps?
Night is a hair's breadth away. Take down the great
goblets
from the shelf, dear friend, for the son of Semele
and Zeus
gave us wine to forget our pains. Mix two parts
water, one wine,
and let us empty the dripping cups—urgently.

DRINK, SONG AND SHIPS

Why water more wine in the great bowl?
Why do you drown your gullet in grape?
I cannot let you spill out your life
on song and drink. Let us go to sea,

and not let the wintry calm of morning
slip by as a drunken sleep. Had we
boarded at dawn, seized rudder and turned
the flapping cross-jack into the wind,

we would be happy now, happy as swimming
in grape. But you draped a lazy arm
on my shoulder, saying: "Sir, a pillow,
your singing does not lead me to ships."

COSTUME

But let them hang braided garlands
of yellow dill around our necks,
and drape strands of redolent myrrh
across our breasts.

ON HIS BROTHER'S HOMECOMING

You have come home from the ends of the earth,
Antimenidas, my dear brother; come
with a gold and ivory handle to your sword.
You fought alongside the Babylonians
and your prowess saved them from annihilation

THE GREEK PERIOD

when you battled and cut down a warrior giant
who was almost eight feet tall.

THE LYRE

Daughter of the rock and the gray sea,
you fill all hearts
with triumph, "tortoise shell of the sea.

BIRDS

What birds are these
Wildgeese—flying from precincts where the earth
and oceans end—
with their enormous wings and speckled throats?

ON MONEY

Aristodamos was not talking rot when he said
one day in Sparta, "Money is the man,
and the poor man is neither noble nor honored."

TO THE RIVER HEBROS

Hebros, most beautiful river near Ainos,
you carry a shining bath of Thracian foam
out into the purple sea. And many virgins
stand near you,

and with soft hands rub oil on the smooth flesh
of their beautiful thighs. And they pour
your water over themselves like a sooth-
ing unguent.

HELEN AND THETIS

Helen, your sinful deeds brought a bitter end
to Priam and his lovely children. They say
because of you holy Ilium was destroyed
by climbing fire.

But the son of Aiakos did not find such a wife
when he summoned the blessed gods to his wedding
and took the delicate sea-nymph Thetis from
the watery palace

THE GREEK PERIOD

of Nereos, bringing her to the mountain cave
of the centaur Chiron. There, the love of Peleus
for his sea-nymph led him to lie naked with
the untouched virgin,

and within the year she bore a son, Achilles;
bravest demi-god and splendid driver of
tawny stallions. But for Helen, Ilium and
her people were destroyed.

HYMN TO APOLLO

Our king Apollo, O child of mighty Zeus,
when you were born your father gave you
a gold headband and a lyre of tortoise shell,
and more: a chariot drawn by swans. You were

to go to Delphi and the Kastalian springs
whose waters are the gift of broad Kephissos,
and there deliver justice to the Hellenes
through the oracles. But when you seized the reins,

you made the swans sail north to the distant land
of the Hyperboreans, and though the Delphians
begged you to return—with paeans of flutes
and circles of girls dancing about the tripod—

Apollo, you remained to rule that people
through the long year. Came the season when the
tripod
rings loud and clear in Delphi, you turned the swans
to Parnassos. It was high noon of summer

when you glided back from the extreme northlands;
swallows and nightingales were singing; cicadas
also sang about you; silver brooks poured down
from Kastalia, and the great river Kephissos

threw blue-foaming waves into the bright wind: yes,
even the waters knew a god was coming home.

THE GREEK PERIOD

THE PEOPLE'S SICKNESS

Poverty—our painful and uncontrolled disease—
you maim great peoples with your sister Helplessness.

HADES*

In all the dominions of the gods
only Death allows no place for sweet hope.

THINGS OF WAR

The great house glitters with bronze. War has patterned the roof with shining helmets, their horsehair plumes waving in wind, headdress of fighting men. And pegs are concealed under bright greaves of brass which block the iron-tipped arrows. Many fresh-linen corslets are hanging and hollow shields are heaped about the floor, and standing in rows are swords of Chalkidian steel, belt-knives and warriors' kilts. We cannot forget our arms and armor when soon our dreadful duties begin.

WALLS AND THE CITY

Not homes with beautiful roofs,
nor walls of permanent stone,
nor canals and piers for ships
make the city—but men of strength.

Not stone and timber, nor skill
of carpenter—but men brave
who will handle sword and spear.

With these you have: city and walls.

* This is sometimes attributed to Sappho.

THE GREEK PERIOD

you will ever return from Hell to see the clean
bright light of the sun? Do not strive for wild hopes.

Even the son of Aiolos, King Sisyphos, wisest of
men,
thought he had eluded death. But for all his brains

Fate made him recross Acheron, and the son of
Kronos
assigned him a terrible trial below the dark earth.

Come, I beg you not to brood about these hopeless
matters while we are young. We will suffer what
must

be suffered. When the wind is waiting in the north,
a good captain will not swing into the open sea.



Sappho



Born about 612 B.C. on Lesbos, she was head of a cult consisting of girls and devoted to poetry and Aphrodite. Sappho married Kerkylas and had a daughter, Kleis. Legend says she leaped from a cliff for love of Phaon.

Her works were arranged in seven books, the seventh comprising wedding songs. These survived into Byzantine times, but were probably destroyed by Christian intolerance. She wrote in the Aiolic dialect. Sappho has been treated abundantly in imaginative literature. See for example Ovid's Sappho Phaon in his *Heroides*, the plays by Grillparzer and Durrell, and Rilke's Sappho an Erinna.

Some say nine Muses. Count again.
Behold the tenth: Sappho of Lesbos.

PLATO

A contemporary of Pittakos and Alkaios was Sappho—a marvel. In all the centuries since history began we know of no woman who in any true sense can be said to rival her as a poet.

STRABO, *Geography*

I want to speak to you but shame
disarms me—

Pure Sappho of the violet braids
and tender smile.

ALKAIOS, Aristotle's *Rhetoric*

THE GREEK PERIOD

THE LYRIC POEM

Come, holy tortoise shell,
my lyre, and become a poem.

HEADDRESS

My mother always said
that in her youth she was
exceedingly in fashion

wearing a purple ribbon
looped in her hair. But
the girl whose hair is yellower

than torchlight should wear no
colorful ribbons from Sardis—
but a garland of fresh flowers.

HER INNOCENCE

I do not have a rancorous spirit
but the simple heart of a child.

TO ANAKTORIA, NOW A SOLDIER'S WIFE IN LYDIA

Some say cavalry and some would claim
infantry or a fleet of long oars
is the supreme sight on the black earth.

I say it is

the girl you love. And easily proved.
Did not Helen, who was queen of mortal
beauty, choose as first among mankind
the very scourge

of Trojan honor? Haunted by Love
she forgot kinsmen, her own dear child,
and wandered off to a remote country.

O weak and fitful

THE GREEK PERIOD

woman bending before any man:
so Anaktoria, although you are
far, do not forget your loving friends.
And I for one

would rather listen to your soft step
and see your radiant face—than watch
all the dazzling horsemen and armored
hoplites of Lydia.

LIGHT VANISHING*

The moon has gone down,
the Pleiades have set.
Night is half gone,
and life speeds by.
I lie in bed, alone.

THE BLAST OF LOVE

Like a windstorm
punishing the oak trees,
love shakes my heart.

SEIZURE

To me that man equals a god
as he sits before you and listens
closely to your sweet voice

and lovely laughter—which troubles
the heart in my ribs. For Brocheo,
when I look at you my voice fails,

my tongue is broken and thin fire
runs like a thief through my body.
My eyes are dead to light, my ears

pound, and sweat pours down over me.
I shudder, I am paler than grass,
and am intimate with dying—but

I must suffer everything, being poor.

* Authorship is uncertain.

THE GREEK PERIOD

WORLD

I could not hope
to touch the sky
with my two arms.

BEACH COLOR

The furzy flower of the golden broom
grew along the shore.

FULL MOON

The glow and beauty of the stars
are nothing near the splendid moon
when in her roundness she burns silver
about the world.

THEN

In gold sandals
dawn like a thief
fell upon me.

SHRILL SONG

When sun sprays the earth
with straight-falling flames,
a cricket rubs his wings,
scraping up thin sweet song.

THE HERALD

Nightingale, with your
lovely voice, you are
the herald of spring.

CONFESSION

But I love refinement, and the bright
and beautiful are for me the same
as desire for sunlight.

EVENING STAR

Hesperos, of all stars,
is the most beautiful.

CEREMONY

Now the earth with many flowers
puts on her embroidery.

DEAR ATTHIS, DID YOU KNOW?

In dream Love came out of heaven
and threw down his purple cloak.

A LETTER TO ATTHIS I

My Atthis, although our dear Anaktoria
lives in distant Sardis,
she thinks of us constantly, and

of the life we shared in days when for her
you were a splendid goddess,
and your singing gave her deep joy.

Now she shines among Lydian women as
when the red-fingered moon
rises after sunset, erasing

stars around her, and pouring light equally
across the salt sea
and over densely flowered fields;

and lucent dew spreads on the earth to quicken
roses and fragile thyme
and the sweet-blooming honey-lotus.

Now while our darling wanders she remem-
bers lovely Atthis' love,
and longing sinks deep in her breast.

She cries loudly for us to come! We hear,
for the night's many tongues
carry her cry across the sea.

A LETTER TO ATTHIS II

In your own words, Atthis, you said:
"Sappho, if you do not come out,
I swear, I will love you no more.

O rise and free your lovely strength
from the bed and shine upon us.
Lift off your Chian nightgown, and

like a pure lily by a spring,
bathe in the water. Our Kleïs
will bring a saffron blouse and violet

tunic from your chest. We will place
a clean mantle on you, and crown
your hair with flowers. So come, darling,

with your beauty that maddens us.
And you, Praxinoa, roast the nuts
for our breakfast. One of the gods

is good to us, for on this day
Sappho, most beautiful of women,
will come with us to the white city

of Mytilene, like a mother
among her daughters." Dearest Atthis,
can you now forget all those days?

TO ATTHIS

So I shall never see Atthis again,
and really I long to be dead,
although she too cried bitterly

when she left, and she said to me,
"Ah, what a nightmare we've suffered.
Sappho, I swear I go unwillingly."

And I answered, "Go, and be happy.
But remember me, for surely you
know how I worshipped you. If not,

THE GREEK PERIOD

then I want you to remember all
the exquisite days we two shared;
how when near me you would adorn

your hanging locks with violets and
tiny roses and your sapling throat
with necklets of a hundred blossoms;

how your young flesh was rich with kingly
myrrh as you leaned near my breasts on
the soft couch where delicate girls

served us all an Ionian could desire;
how we went to every hill, brook,
and holy place, and when early spring

filled the woods with noises of birds
and a choir of nightingales—we two
in solitude were wandering there."

TO ATTHIS

1

Love-bittersweet, irrepressible—
loosens my limbs and I tremble.

2

Yet, Atthis, you despise my being.
To chase Andromeda, you leave me.

TO ATTHIS

I loved you, Atthis, long ago,
when my girlhood was in full flower
and you were like a graceless child.

LONG DEPARTURE

Then I said to the elegant ladies:
"How you will remember when you are old
the glorious things we did in our youth!

THE GREEK PERIOD

We did many pure and beautiful things.
Now that you are leaving the city,
love's sharp pain encircles my heart."

A PRAYER TO APHRODITE

On your delicate throne, Aphrodite,
sly eternal daughter of Zeus,
I beg you: do not crush me with grief,

but come to me now—as once
you heard my far cry, and yielded,
slipping from your father's house

to yoke the birds to your gold
chariot, and came. Handsome swallows
brought you swiftly to the dark earth,

their wings whipping the middle sky.
Happy, with deathless lips, you smiled:
"What is wrong, why have you called me?

What does your mad heart desire?
Whom shall I make love you, Sappho,
who is turning her back on you?

Let her run away, she'll soon chase you;
refuse your gifts, she'll soon give them.
She will love you, though unwillingly."

Then come to me now and free me
from fearful agony. Labor
for my mad heart, and be my ally.

TO APHRODITE OF THE FLOWERS, AT KNOSSOS

Come to the holy temple of the virgins
where the pleasant grove of apple trees
circles an altar smoking with frank-
incense.

THE GREEK PERIOD

The roses leave shadow on the ground
and cool springs murmur through apple branches
where shuddering leaves pour down profound sleep.

In that meadow where horses have grown
glossy, and all spring flowers grow wild,
the anise shoots fill the air with aroma.

And there our queen Aphrodite pours
celestial nectar in the gold cups,
which she fills gracefully with sudden joy.

PARALYSIS

Mother darling, I cannot work the loom
for the Cyprian has almost crushed me,
broken me with love for a slender boy.

TO EROS

From all the offspring
of the earth and heaven
Love is the most precious.

HOMAGE

Our slender Adonis is dying, Kytherea,
tell us what to do.
Tear open your dresses, virgins, and
batter your breasts!

TO THE QUEEN OF LOVE

Cyprian, come
and gently pour nectar in our
golden cups, and pour joy too
in all our hearts.

THE GREEK PERIOD

LOVE TOKEN

Your face is shaded, Aphrodite,
with a kerchief of porphyry
color: a precious gift from Timas
of far Phokaea.

DIALOG

Cyprus-born,
in dream just
we two spoke.

TO APHRODITE

For you, Aphrodite, I will burn
the savory fat of a white she-goat.
All this I will leave behind for you.

LONELINESS

Poor Adonis—who must live
four months without a woman.*

BECAUSE OF A RIVAL

Sappho, why do you condemn
the many joys of Aphrodite?

A RIVAL

By now I've had
my fill of Gorgo.

THE VIRGIN

Like a sweet apple reddening on the high
tip of the topmost branch and forgotten
by the pickers—no, beyond their reach.

Like a hyacinth crushed in the mountains
by shepherds; lying trampled on the earth
yet blooming purple.

* Adonis lived four months of each year with Aphrodite, four months with Persephone and four months alone.

THE GREEK PERIOD

BRIDEGROOM

My lovely bridegroom, you are
most like a slender sapling.

MARRIAGE SONG

Happy groom, we virgins at your door
will pass the night singing of the love
between you and your bride. Her breasts
are like sweet violets.

With the rays of dawn wake and leave,
and let the great god Hermes lead you
where dog days will not come—no more
than will our sleep tonight.

AFTER THE CEREMONY

1

Happy groom, the wedding
took place as you hoped,
and the girl you prayed for
is yours. Now soft love
grazes her charming face.

2

O bride, your eyes have
the calm glow of honey.
You are formed of grace,
and Love pours his light
on your perfect features.
Aphrodite honored you
exceedingly well.

VERY TALL GROOM

Raise the ceiling
—and sing hymen.
Have the skilled
carpenters prop up
the beams and braces
—and sing hymen.

THE GREEK PERIOD

Like towering Ares
the groom is lanky:
a poet of Lesbos
taller than all.

Now sing hymen!

THE GUARD OUTSIDE THE BRIDAL CHAMBER

The doorkeeper's feet are fourteen
yards long. Ten shoemakers used up
five oxhides to cobble each sandal.

SHALL I?

I do not know what to do:
I say yes—and then no.

ONE NIGHT

All the while, believe me, I prayed
our night would last twice as long.

DANCERS

While the full moon rose, young girls
took their place around the altar.

In old days Cretan girls danced
supplely around an altar of love,
crushing the soft flowering grass.

BRIDE

O beautiful, O charming bride,
now you play with gold Aphrodite
and the roseate-ankled Graces.

LOSS

Virginity, my virginity,
when you leave me, where will you go?

I will go and never return to you.
I will never return, O bride.

REMORSE

Do I still long
for my virginity?

WEDDING OF ANDROMACHE

A herald came: swift Idaios of the strong legs
with a famous report from the depths of Asia:

"Hektor and his comrades bring a dark-eyed girl
from holy Thebe and the streams of Plakia:
splendid Andromache coming with the navy
over the salt sea. They bear many gold bracelets
and purple gowns and odd trinkets of rare design
and countless silver goblets and pieces of ivory."

So the herald spoke; and Priam sprang to his feet
and the sparkling news was carried to his friends
throughout the wide city. Instantly the sons of Ilios
harnessed the mules to the finely-wheeled chariots,
and a throng of wives and slender-ankled virgins
climbed inside. Priam's daughters rode alone,
while young men led their horses under the carts
and drove them out of the city . . .

Like gods . . . holy . . . they all set out for Ilium
to the confusion of sweet flutes and crashing
cymbals,

and the virgins sang a loud heavenly song
whose wonderful echo touched the sky. Everywhere
was laughter in the streets and bowls and chalices.

Myrrh and cassia and incense rode on the wind.
Elder women shouted and all the men sang out
with thrilling power and raised a paean to Apollo—
O mighty bowman and skillful player of the lyre—
singing of Hektor and Andromache as of gods.

HER RIVAL'S PEDIGREE

A very bright good morning,
Andromeda—O daughter
from kings and sons of kings.

THE GREEK PERIOD

RIVAL

I have lost, and you, Andromeda,
have made an excellent exchange.

ANDROMEDA, WHAT NOW?

Can this farm girl
in farm-girl finery burn your heart?
She is even ignorant of the way
to lift her gown over her ankles.

TO AN UNEDUCATED WOMAN

When dead you will lie forever forgotten,
for you have no claim to the Pierian roses.
Dim here, you will move more dimly in Hell,
flitting among the undistinguished dead.

TO A HANDSOME MAN

Stand up and gaze on me as friend
to friend. I ask you to reveal
the naked beauty of your eyes.

RETURN

O Gongyla, my darling rose,
put on your milkwhite gown.
I want you to come back quickly.
My desire grazes on your beauty.

Each time I see your gown
I am made weak and happy.
I too blamed the Cyprian;
I pray she will not seek revenge
but soon return to me *you*,
Gongyla, whom I desire.

IN TIME OF STORM

When seastorms scream across the water,
the sailor, fearing these wild blasts,
spills his cargo overboard and veers
his vessel shoreward.

THE GREEK PERIOD

I pray that I may be bound nowhere
in time of storm, yet let my heart
not fear to cast her cargo as jetsam
into the salt depths,

and let Nereus, with all the proper
ocean ceremonies, receive
the gift of my goods.

ART

No girl I think will ever outshine
your skill—no girl who will ever
look into sunlight.

IMMORTAL GOLD

Gold is a child of god.
No moth or worm eats it,
and it overcomes mortal
beings—even the strongest.*

ASIAN DYES

Her gay embroidered gown
draped down to her toes:
fine needlework from Lydia.

TO DIKA, NOT TO GO BARE-HEADED

With your skillful fingers, Dika, twine
a loop of dill spray for your lovely hair.
The happy Graces flatter one who wears flowers
but turn away from unadorned plainness.

YIELDING

No more. Do not try
to bend a hard heart.

TRIAL

When anger floods into my chest,
I bite my tongue—not to explode.

* There is a similar poem, with different ending, by Pindar.

THE GREEK PERIOD

HOMECOMING

You came. And you did well to come.
I longed for you and you brought fire
to my heart, which burns high for you.

Welcome, darling, be blessed three times
for all the hours of our separation.

A RETURN

Safe now. I've flown to you
like a child to its mother.

OUT OF ALL MANKIND

Is there in any land
any girl whom you love
more than you love me?

TO HER DETRACTOR

As for him who blames me,
let him walk with madness
and stumble through sorrows.

GESTURE OF THE BEAUTIFUL

One day I watched a delicious
slender girl picking flowers.

TO HER GIRLFRIENDS

On this day I will sing beautifully
and make you happy, sweet comrades.

WEATHERCOCKS

Those whom I treated kindly,
especially injure me now.

HOMECOMING

Soft girl from whom I was
altogether cut off,
I have come home again.

THE GREEK PERIOD

REST

The night closed their eyes
and then night poured down
black sleep upon their lids.

AN ENCOUNTER

You came to my house and sang to me,
and so I have come. Speak. Come down
and release me from the silence of
your beauty.

We were walking near your home when you
saw us. Now I ask: quickly, send your
girls away, and may the gods grant me
what they will.

TO A FRIEND

When I look at you, it is not
Hermione I think of: a mortal girl,
but I am moved as before the beauty
of blond Helen.

ABOUT KLEÏS

I have a small daughter who
is beautiful like a gold flower.
I would not trade my darling Kleïs
for all Lydia or even for
the beautiful island Lesbos.

FROM HER EXILE

I have no embroidered headband
for you, Kleïs, and no idea
where to find one while Myrsilos

rules in Mytilene. The bright
ribbon reminds me of those days
when our enemies were in exile.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TO CHARAXOS, HER BROTHER

You are in the net of a vagrant liaison
where you call a public whore beautiful.

TO CHARAXOS, HER BROTHER

And Cyprian, I hope she finds even you too
bitter; that she will have no chance to brag
"I, Doricha, came back to my most desired love
a second time."

FOR PELAGON

Pelagon the fisherman. His father
Meniskos placed here a fishbasket
and oar: relics of a wretched life.

EMPTINESS

I have never found you
so repulsive, O peace.

A WOMAN'S PLEA

I pray for long life and health.
My children, I would escape
from wrinkles and cling to youth.

SAPPHO SAYS:

Death is our evil. The gods believe this,
or else by now they would be dead.

ON TIMAS

Here is the dust of Timas. Unmarried,
she sank to Persephone's black chambers,
and when she was dead her lovely comrades
took iron knives and sheared their soft hair.

THE SWAN'S GIFT

It is said that Leda long ago
found a hidden egg the color
of hyacinths.

THE GREEK PERIOD

IT IS LATE

Even if you love me, find
a younger woman. I could
never bear to share my bed
with a man younger than I.

YOU FORGOT

And I am now wholly
gone into oblivion.

HER WEALTH

The golden Muses gave me
true riches: when dead
I will not be forgotten.

LAST PRAISES

If my nipples were to drip milk
and my womb still carry a child,
I would enter this marriage bed
intrepidly,

but age dries my flesh with a thousand
wrinkles, and love is in no hurry
to seize my body with the gifts
of pleasant pain.

Yet, let us sing praises to her
who wears the scent of violets
on her young breasts.

HER FRIENDS

No, my heart can never change
toward you who are so lovely.

EVENING STAR

Hesperos, you bring home all the bright dawn
disperses,
bring home sheep,
bring home goats, bring children home to their
mothers.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TO HERMES

Hermes came to me in a dream. I said
—My master, I am altogether lost,
and my many riches do not console me.
I care only
to die, and watch the dewy lotus
along the banks of Acheron, river of Hell.

TO HER DAUGHTER WHEN SAPPHO WAS DYING

It would be wrong for us. It is not right
for mourning to enter a home of poetry.

SOMEONE, I TELL YOU

Somebody, I tell you,
someone in future time
will remember us.

We are oppressed by
oblivion, by the idea
of nothing at all,

yet are saved by the
judgment of good men.



Alkman



Worked during the latter half of seventh century at Sparta, but probably came from Sardis in Asia Minor. He wrote six books of poems, mainly choral, in strong Doric dialect.

Do not judge the man by the grave-stone. The tomb you see is small but it holds the bones of a great man. For know that this is Alkman, supreme artist of the Lakonian lyre, who commanded the nine Muses. And twin continents dispute whether he is of Lydia or Lakonia, for the mothers of a singer are many.

ANTIPATER OF THESSALONIKA



ARS POETICA

I know the tunes
of every bird,

but I, Alkman, found my words and song
in the tongue
of the strident partridge.

REST

Now chasms and mountain summits are asleep,
and sierra slopes and ravines;
creeping things nourished by the dark earth,
hillside beasts and generations of bees,
monsters in the depths of the purple brine,
all lie asleep,
and also tribes of flying birds.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON THE FEATS OF A YOUNG GIRL

Often at night along the mountain tops,
when the gods are reveling by torch light,
you came carrying a great jar
(like one shepherds use) but of heavy gold.
You filled the jar with milk
drawn from a lioness, and made a great cheese
unbroken and gleaming white.

ON THE WORM

The dappled worm is the murderer
within the eye of blooming vines.

IN MYTHOLOGY

Dew, a child of moon and air,
causes the deergrass to grow.

SONG FOR A CHOIR OF VIRGINS*

THE WHOLE CHOIR

There is a vengeance from the gods,
but happy is the man who weaves
the fabric of his days with peace,
and without tears.

AGIDO'S HALF-CHOIR

But I sing
of Agido's light. I see her
like the sun who shines on us
by order of Agido.

HAGESICHORA'S HALF-CHOIR

Our splendid
leader will not have us praise
or abuse her, for her brilliance
is as if among a herd of cattle
one had set a champion racehorse,

* The choir consists of ten virgins. The half-choirs speak in the first person singular, in friendly rivalry, each praising their own half-choir leaders.

THE GREEK PERIOD

sinewy, strong, with thunder-ringing hooves,
a creature from a dream with wings.
Do you see? The horse is Venetian,
and the mane of our cousin
Hagesichora is a blossom
of the purest gold,
and below is her silver face.
Can I tell you this more clearly?
There you have Hagesichora.
In beauty she may be second to Agido
but she will run like a
Scythian horse against a Lydian racer.
For as we carry Orthria's plow
so the Pleiades of dawn will rise
and strive against us
like the burning star of Sirios
through the ambrosial night.

AGIDO'S HALF-CHOIR

All our wealth of purple dye
or the dappled snake of full gold
about our wrist or our Lydian
wimple that is the sweet glory
of all these tender-eyed girls,
no, nothing will keep them off.
Not Nanno's soft braids,
nor Areta's godlike beauty,
neither Thylakis nor Kleësisera.

HAGESICHORA'S HALF-CHOIR

You need not go to Ainesimbrotia
and say: let Astaphis be mine,
have Philylla look my way,
and Damareta and darling Ianthemis.
For Hagesichora is our saviour.
Is Hagesichora of the lovely
ankles not right here with us?

AGIDO'S HALF-CHOIR

Yes, she waits by our Agido,
and commends our ceremonies.

THE GREEK PERIOD

O gods, receive our prayers,
for you determine everything
accomplished. My choir leader,
I tell you I, a virgin, shrieked
in vain like an owl
from the roof tops.

HAGESICHORA'S HALF-CHOIR

But my great wish
is to please the Lady of the Dawn
who has healed our sore wounds.
Only Hagesichora could give
her virgins the peace they desired.

THE WHOLE CHOIR

A great chariot simply follows
the course of its trace-horse;
in a vessel all must swiftly
heed the shouting of the helmsman,
so our combined choir may not
sing more sweetly than the Sirens—
for they are gods—but how we sang,
we ten girls with even one away!
And her song is like a swan
by the Xanthos river, and she
with the splendor of her blond hair.

SUPPLICATION

The girls fell to their knees, helpless—
like small birds under a hovering hawk.

HOME OF THE NORTH WIND

The Phippe mountain flowering with forests
is the breast of black-flowing night.

TO THE DIOSKOUROI

Kastor and noble Polydeukes, you trainers
of swift stallions, are extraordinary horsemen.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TO HERA

I pray to you, Hera,
and bring you as my offering
a delicate garland of marigold
and galingale.

ON THE POET ALKMAN

He is no boorish farmer or
a clumsy pigkeeper or even
a sheep-chaser. He was not born
in Thessaly or Erysiche
but in Sardis on the high hills.

ON A POETESS

Aphrodite commands and love rains
upon my body and melts my heart

for Megalostrata to whom the sweet
Muse gave the gift of poetry. O
happy girl of the goldenrod hair!

ALKMAN'S SUPPER

Get him that enormous caldron on the tripod
so he can bloat his stomach with every food.
It is cool now but soon will boil with good soup
which that gobbler Alkman likes sparkling hot,
especially in the cold season of the solstice.
The glutton Alkman abstains from fancy dishes
but like the demos eats a plain massive meal.

WEDDING FEAST

Seven couches and as many tables
spread with poppy cakes and linseed and
sesame, and among the wooden flagons
were honey cakes for the young.

THE FOUR SEASONS

Three seasons were created: summer
and winter and a third in autumn,

THE GREEK PERIOD

and even a fourth—the spring—
when the fields are heavy with crops
and a glutton still goes hungry.

LAKONIAN WINE

I know the wine from the Five Hills,
the wine from Oinos or Denthiaades
or Karystos or the wine of Onogla
or Stathmi—these unboiled, unfired
wines have the finest aroma.

ON THE KALCHA FLOWER

She wears a gold chain
made from slender petals
of purple kalcha flowers.

THE JOURNEY

Narrow is our way of life
and necessity is pitiless.

ON TANTALOS

The guilty man sat
among pleasant things under a hanging rock,
and from his chair he looked
and then the vision faded.

APHRODITE

You are from the beautiful island Cyprus
and from the sea-surrounded city Paphos.

WANDERING LOVE

It is not Aphrodite but riotous Love who is
playing like a child,
scuttling down across the tips of meadow ferns.
I say, do not crush them.

THE GREEK PERIOD

TO THE MOON GODDESS

I am your servant, Artemis.

You draw your long bow at night,
clothed in the skins of wild beasts.

Now hear our beautiful singing.

I AM OLD

O girls of honey-sweet voices, my limbs are weak.
They will not bear me. I wish, ah, I wish I were
a carefree kingfisher flying over flowering foam
with the halcyons—sea-blue holy birds of spring.

MAN'S LESSONS

Experience and suffering
are the mother of wisdom.

ON HIS POETRY

Muse of the round sky, daughter of Zeus,
I sing my poems loud and clear to you.

WINDFLOWER

Bright-shining.



Anakreon



Born about 570 on the island of Teos. He left in 545 to avoid the Persians, and joined in the founding of Abdera in Thrace. Anakreon spent some time at the court of Polykrates on Samos; at Athens with the tyrant Hipparchos; in Thessaly; and again at Athens. His death in old age was due, according to legend, to a grape pip which stuck in his throat.

His works, in six books, consisted of lyrics (mainly monodic), iambics, and elegies. His dialect is chiefly Ionic.

Anakreon's poetic works are entirely erotic.

CICERO, Tusculan Disputations

The grammarian Didymus wrote four thousand books . . . in which he discusses whether Anakreon was more of a rake than a sot, whether Sappho was a prostitute, and other questions the answers to which you should forget if you knew them.

SENECA, Letters to Lucilius

Stranger, passing near the tomb of
Anakreon,
pour me a libation as you
approach,
for in life I was a drunkard.

ANONYMOUS

THE GREEK PERIOD

ARTEMIS

On my knees I speak to you,
Artemis, hunter of deer,
blond child of Zeus, and queen
of roaming beasts. From pools
of the river Lethaios you gaze
across a city of brave men.
Serenity. You are a shepherd
of no flock of savage citizens.

DEDICATION FOR A PICTURE

From left to right: Helikonias holding a
thyrsus; beside her Xanthippe and then Glauke.
All walk down the hill with ivy and a generous
bunch of grapes and a young goat for Dionysos.

THE VISION OF LOVE

On easy wings I glide to Olympos where
I seek my master Eros,
but he no longer lets me run down warm women
as in my doghood days:
he sees my graying beard and passes me by,
while I stand transfixed
in the wind made by his wings of quivering gold.

ON AN OLD LOVER

Eros, the blond god of lovers,
strikes me with a purple ball
and asks me to play with a girl
wearing colorful sandals;

but the girl is from beautiful
Lesbos, and scorns my white hair,
and turning her back runs gaping
behind another girl.

ON WOMANLY AIRS

My Thracian foal, why do you glare with disdain
and then shun me absolutely as if I knew
nothing of this art?

THE GREEK PERIOD

I tell you I could bridle you with tight straps,
seize the reins and gallop you around the posts
of the pleasant course.

But you prefer to graze on the calm meadow,
or frisk and gambol gayly—having no manly
rider to break you in.

PREPARATIONS FOR LOVE

Bring out water and wine and an armful
of flowers.

I want the proper setting
when I spar a few rounds with love.

EROS

Eros, the blacksmith of love,
smashed me with a giant hammer
and doused me in the cold river.

THE PLUNGE

Lord! I clamber up the white cliff
and dive into the steaming wave,
dead drunk with love.

ON A CONSERVATIVE LOVER

I love and yet do not love.
I am mad yet not quite mad.

DEFINITION OF A WHORE

Given-to-all and
celebrated by the masses,
a carrier-of-peoples
and an apple orchard
of mad haunches.

ON STREETWALKERS

Although we call these women loose,
they tighten their thighs around thighs.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON THE FORTUNES OF ARTEMON

Once he went about in filthy clothes and waspy hair,
with wooden rings in his ears, and wore around his
 ribs
an unwashed hairy oxhide from an old miserable
shield.
Our con-man pimped a living from bakery girls and
 whores,
and got his neck bound to a whipping block where
 the leather
made raw meat of his back—and best, he rode the
 wheel
so that hairs could be torn from his beard and scalp.

But now the good Artemon rides like a generous lord
in an excellent coach or litter; he wears gold earrings
and carries a special ivory parasol like a grand lady.

CHARIOTEER

O maidenlike youth,
I see you though you will not look my way.
You are unaware that you handle the reins
 of my soul.

ON DRINKING PARTIES

I do not like the man who sits by his bowl
 and sobs about the sad wars,
but the rake who loves to rave about fine feats
 in the arts and art of love.

A WAY TO THE HEART

 Come swiftly
and rub aromatic myrrh on her breasts:
the hollow cave around her heart.

ON THE ORIGIN OF MULES OR HALF-ASSES

The Mysians were first in perfecting the art
of coupling mare-hopping donkeys with horses.

THE GREEK PERIOD

OF EFFEMINACY

In the morning they were joined in marriage,
though later in the same chamber
the groom could not join with his wife.

DECEMBER

We go through Poseidon's month.
Ponderous clouds sag with water
and furious storms break out
collapsing the rain earthward.

ON A HOPLITE

Here, the tomb of Timokritos, a hero in the wars.
It is the coward whom Ares spares—not the brave.

ON A GUARDIAN ANGEL

Now I hang in Athene's gleaming temple.
It was I who brought Python safely home
from the dreadful wars:
I, his shield.

VACILLATION

The bird flashes back and forth
between the black leaves of laurel trees
and the greenness of the olive grove.

ON THE SOLDIER AGATHON

All members of this village have come to weep
at your funeral pyre, O courageous Agathon,
who died for Abdera:
for in the chaos of the horrible battlefield,
blood-loving Ares never before slaughtered
a more fearless youth.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON KLEINORIDES, LOST AT SEA

You too, Kleinorides, were lost loving your country
as you confronted the wintry blast of the South
Wind.

In the spring season of your life you died unwed;
the seawaves washed away your graceful adoles-
cence.

ENCOUNTER

I looked at her and took off
like a frightened cuckoo bird.

CANDOR

Personally,
I hate those who are furtive and touchy, morose
in their ways. I have learned that you, Megistes,
are of the innocent: of the childlike ones.

ON DEATH

My temples are white, my head largely bald.
Graceful youth has departed from my face,
and my teeth are loose teeth of an old man.

I have few years left of sweet life.

Therefore I tremble fearing the underworld,
for the lightless chasm of death is dreadful
and the descent appalling: once cast down
into Hell, there is no return.

PREPARATION

Let us hang garlands of celery
across our foreheads,
and call a festival to Dionysos.

Xenophanes

Of Kolophon, a poet and philosopher, migrated to Sicily after the Persian invasion of Asia Minor. He is believed to have been almost one hundred years of age when he died in 470 B.C.

When someone related to Xenophanes that he had seen eels alive in hot water, he said: "Then we can boil them in cold."

PLUTARCH, *Common Notions against the Stoics*

Consider Xenophanes' remark that it is just as impious to say that the gods were born as to say that they died. Both statements imply that at some time they did not exist.

ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*

You Xenophaneses, Diagorases, Hippons, Epikouroses, and the rest of that catalogue of odious god-forsaken wretches, go drop dead.

AELIAN

Xenophanes says there are four elements in existing things, and an infinite number of separate worlds. Clouds are made from vapor of the sun carried upward into the air. The essence of god is spherical, in no way resembling man. He is all eyes and all ears but does not breathe. He is in his totality mind and thinking, and is eternal. Xenophanes was the first to have declared that all that exists is transitory and destructible, and that the soul is breath or spirit.

DIOGENES LAERTIOS, *Lives of the Philosophers*

THE GREEK PERIOD

BANQUET DECORUM

Now the floor is scrubbed clean, our hands are washed

and cups are dry. A boy loops garlands in our hair. Another passes round a phial of redolent balsam. The mixing bowl is bubbling with good cheer, and more fragrant wine stands potent in the earthen jars.

Incense floats a holy perfume through the room. Water is cold, crystal, sweet.

Golden bread is set near on a princely table loaded down with cheese and rich honey. The altar in the center is submerged in flowers and the house vibrates with fun and singing.

Gracious men should first sing praises to god with proper stories and pure words.

After the libation when we pray for strength to act with rectitude (our first concern),

there is no sin in drinking all one can

and still get home without a servant—

unless too old. We commend the man who shows good memory after drink; who seeks virtue

and not to harangue us with the ancient myths of crashing wars of Titans, Giants,

Centaurs. These things are worth nothing. The good lies in our reverence for the gods.

GAY DAYS IN ASIATIC KOLOPHON

They acquired useless luxuries out of Lydia

while still free from her odious tyranny;

paraded to the market place in sea-purple robes,

often in bright swarms of a thousand.

They were proud and pleased in their elaborate hairdo's

and drowned body smells with rare perfumes.

THE NATURE OF GOD

There is one god—supreme among gods and men—who is like mortals in neither body nor mind.

THE GREEK PERIOD

AGNOSTIC CREDO

The truth is that no man ever was or will be
who understands the gods and all I speak of.
If you stumble on some rocks of the whole truth
you never know it. There is always speculation.

PYTHAGORAS AND THE TRANSMIGRATED SOUL

One day a dog was being thrashed in the street,
and behold, Pythagoras, philosopher of spirits,
was chancing by.

His heart was in his mouth
for the poor pup.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried.
"Don't beat him any more.
This is my dear friend's soul.
I recognize the voice when I hear him bark."

KNOWLEDGE

The gods did not enrich man
with a knowledge of all things
from the beginning of life.
Yet man seeks, and in time
invents what may be better.

THE MAKING OF GODS

1

Man made his gods, and furnished them
with his own body, voice and garments.

2

If a horse or lion or a slow ox
had agile hands for paint and sculpture,
the horse would make his god a horse,
the ox would sculpt his as a beast.

THE GREEK PERIOD

3

Our gods have flat noses and black skins
say the Ethiopians. The Thracians say
our gods have red hair and hazel eyes.

ON WATERS AND WINDS

Sea is a source of water and source of wind.
With no great ocean there would be no wind,
no moving rivers nor rainwater from the sky.
Great ocean is father of clouds, winds, rivers.

THE PHYSICAL ORIGIN OF THE RAINBOW

Whom they call Iris—is also a raincloud
which we see as purple, scarlet, green.

THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE

Everything comes from the earth,
and everything ends in the earth.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

All that is born and grows
comes from water and earth.

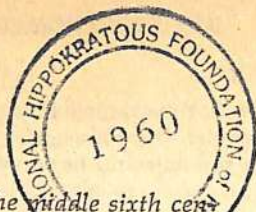
LAMPOON AGAINST HOMER AND HESIOD

Homer and Hesiod emblazoned the gods
with all that is shameful and scandalous
in man:
stealing, adultery and mutual deceit.

THE SHAPE OF THE EARTH

At our feet we see this end of the earth
where it rises to meet the firmament.
Below, the world sinks down unendingly.

Ibykos



Active during the middle sixth century B.C., first in Sicily, then at the court of Polykrates in Samos. In Sicily, he wrote lyric narratives in the manner of Stesichoros, but in Samos he changed to erotic themes. Ibykos was said to have been murdered by robbers and avenged by birds who witnessed the murder.

Caught by robbers in a deserted spot, he was killed exclaiming that the very cranes which flew over at the moment would prove his avengers. Some time afterwards one of the robbers saw some cranes in the city and cried, "Look! the avengers of Ibykos." Whereupon one of the bystanders enquired into the matter of this speech of his. The crime was admitted, and the robbers brought to justice. Hence the proverb: "The cranes of Ibykos."

SUIDAS

As foolish as Ibykos.

PROVERB BY DIOGENES

What extravagant things Alkaios writes on the love of youths! And as for Anakreon, his poetry is erotic from beginning to end. Yet to judge from his works they all were surpassed in this matter by Ibykos of Rhegium. And the love of all these poets was sensual love.

CICERO

THE GREEK PERIOD

LOVE'S SEASON

In spring the quince trees
ripen in the virgins' holy orchard
with river waters;
and grapes turn violet
under the shade of luxuriant leafage
and newborn shoots.

But for me, Eros
knows no winter sleep, and as north winds
burn down from Thrace
with searing lightning,
Kypri^s mutilates my heart with black
and baleful love.

MORNING

Dawn that ends our sleep
also wakes
the loud nightingale.

LIKE AN OLD CHAMPION

Even now Eros looks at me with tenderness
from under dark eyelids, and casts me spellbound
into Aphrodite's nets where I lie caught
inextricably,

for I swear his mere approach makes me tremble
like an old champion chariot horse, as he
draws a swift cart unwillingly to the race.

RESEMBLING THE BIRDS

In the high branches perch the mottled ducks
and purple cormorants with their sleek throats
and kingfishers of the long wings.

O let my heart always be like the birds
of the purple crest and long wings.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON FLOWERS

Myrtles and violets and yellow cassidones,
apple flowers and roses and glossy laurel.

ON EURYALOS

Euryalos, child of the exquisite Graces
and darling of the lovely-haired Muses,
you were reared by Kypriis and soft-eyed Peitho
among the blossoms of the rose.

ON FEMININE NATURE AND PUBLIC DECENCY

Spartan girls
are naked-thighed and man-crazy.

CONSTELLATION

Burning across the endless night
like brilliant dog-stars.

ON HERAKLES

I killed the boys on the white horse,
the sons of Moline.

They had a single body; their age
and faces were identical—being
Siamese twins and born together
in a silver egg.

THE IMPOSSIBLE

When a man is dead one can find
no medicine to bring him life.

ON A MAN-MADE PENINSULA IN SYRACUSE

With mortal hands they joined the island
of Ortygia to the stony mainland,
where once there was a hunting zone
for seasnails and carnivorous fish.

Phokylides



*Active about 540 B.C., at Miletos.
He wrote hexameter and elegiac
poems on moral subjects.*

To prove this we might consider
the poetry of Hesiod, Theognis and
Phokylides, who are declared to be
the best counsellors ever known in
matters of human life.

ISOKRATES, *To Nikokles*

Archilochos may be reproached for
his subject matter, Parmenides for
his prosody and Phokylides for his
poverty of expression. . . . Yet each
deserves praise for his special in-
nate ability to stir and lead his
audience.

PLUTARCH, *On Listening*

APPEARANCE OF WISDOM

Many empty-headed clods pass by like sages
when they walk with chin erect and stern eyes.

ON THE PROBLEM OF CHOOSING A WIFE

In the words of Phokylides: the tribes of women
come in four breeds: bitch, bee and grimy sow,
and sinewy mare with draping mane. The mare
is healthy, swift, roundly built and on the loose.
The monster-looking sow is neither good nor rotten,
and the bristling bitch lies snapping at the leash.

Yes, the bee is best: a whizz at cleaning, trim
and good in cooking. My poor friend, I tell you,
for a wild, happy marriage, pray now for a bee.

Simonides



Born about 556 B.C. on the island of Keos, he lived at the court of Hipparchos in Athens for a time, went to Thessaly, and returned to Athens by 490. Later, he went to the court of Hieron at Syracuse. He died in Sicily in 468. He was reputed to be ugly, and shrewd in finance.

Simonides composed choral poetry in many genres, especially Threnoi and Epinikia (the latter less solemn than those of Pindar). He also wrote elegies and elegiac epigrams, often concerning the Persian Wars. His dialect was mild Doric in choral lyric, Ionic in elegy.

"Still," I said, "I do not find it easy to disbelieve a wise and inspired artist like Simonides."

PLATO, *Republic*

When Simonides was discussing wisdom and riches with Hieron's wife, and she asked him which was better, to become wise or to become wealthy, he replied, "To become wealthy. For I see the wise sitting on the doorsteps of the rich."

ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*

His chief excellence lies in his pathos. Indeed some consider that in this quality he surpasses all other writers in this kind of literature.

QUINTILIAN, *Guide to Oratory*

THE GREEK PERIOD

MEN OF THE FRONT RANKS

Through their extraordinary courage, the wide
farmlands of Tegea
have not shot fire and smoke into the sky.
For they made their choice
to leave their children in a country green
and sweet with freedom,
and died for this in the wild ranks of battle.

ON THE LAKEDAIMONIANS FALLEN AT PLATAIA

These men left an altar of glory on their land,
shining in all weather,
when they were enveloped by the black mists of
death.
But although they died
they are not dead, for their courage raises them in
glory
from the rooms of Hell.

ON THE GREEKS FALLEN AT EURYMEDON

With mindless bravura Ares washed his long sleek
arrowheads
in the crimson waters within their chests,
and dust now lies not on the living flesh
of javelineers,
but on the vivid remnants of lifeless bodies.

ON THOSE WHO DIED AT THERMOPYLAE

Those who fell dead at Thermopylae
found a glorious road, a beautiful fate.
Their tomb is an altar on which stand our bowls of
remembrance
and the wine of our praise.
Neither mold and worms, nor time
which destroys all things, will blacken their deaths.
The shrine of these brave men
has found its guardian

THE GREEK PERIOD

in the glory of Greece. Leonidas, the Spartan king,
lives in the great ornament he left behind
of unending fame and virtue.

GRAVE BY THE WATER

We were slaughtered in a Dirphian gully, and our
graves,
 near Euripes, were paid for by our nation.
Justice. For in confronting the cruel clouds of war,
 we gave away our years of lovely youth.

ARETE (VIRTUE, COURAGE, ACHIEVEMENT)

 It is said
that virtue lives on a rock
painful to climb and guarded by
a pure band of evasive nymphs.
No mortal eye may look upon her
unless consuming sweat pours from his body,
and he climbs the summit of manliness.

INSCRIPTION FOR ATHENIAN HEROES WHO FOUGHT AT THE ISTHMUS

When her fate rested on the razor's edge,
we gave away our lives to save all Greece.

REPORT FROM THERMOPYLAE

Stranger, go to the Spartans and announce
that we, now in our graves, obeyed their laws.

VICTORY AT MARATHON

At Marathon the Athenians fought for all Greece
and broke the spearhead of Persia's crack troops.

ON THOSE WHO DIED WITH LEONIDAS

Leonidas, king of the open fields of Sparta,
 those slain with you lie famous in their graves,
for they attacked absorbing the head-on assault
 of endless Persian men, arrows and swift horse.

THE GREEK PERIOD

AN ORACLE'S DEATH AT THERMOPYLAE

This is the tomb of famous Megistias, slain by
the Persians near the Spercheios river,
a seer who even when aware that death was near,
would not desert his Spartan kings.

ON MEGAKLES

When I look at the tomb of Megakles
with its dead body,
I pity you, poor Kallia, his father.

CROSSING THE GULF OF CORINTH

All these victors from the Tyrrhenian wars
were on their way to Apollo at Delphi
with their first plunder

when they found their grave
on one night, in one ship, in one deep sea.

THE ATHENIAN VANGUARD

Athenian sons demolished the Persian army
and saved their country from painful slavery.

SOCIAL DICTUM

The city is the teacher of the man.

ON IPHIMENES

O Geraneia, tall-air mountain of evil,
I wish you faced the far Danube or Tanais,
river of distant Scythia;
that the Skeironian precipice did not rise
from the sea where Iphimenes sailed around
the broken rock of Molouris.
Now he is a frozen corpse in the gulf,
and this open tomb tells of his bitter voyage.

THE GREEK PERIOD

DANAE AND THE INFANT PERSEUS IMPRISONED IN A CHEST ON THE SEA

When a tilting sea and thundering winds
tossed the sculpted chest and filled Danaë
with terror, bringing tears to her cheeks,
she placed her arm lovingly around
Perseus, saying: "My child, how I suffer,
and yet your heart is calm, while you sleep
profoundly in the blue darkness of night
and shine in our sad bronze-ribbed boat.
Do not think of the heaving salt-wave
that seeps in through air-holes and drenches
your hair, nor of the clamoring wind;
but lying in our sea-violet blanket,
keep your beautiful face close to mine.

If you knew of our terrible plight,
your delicate ears would hear my words.
But I tell you, sleep, my son, and let
the sea sleep and our great troubles end.
I ask you in prayer, O father Zeus,
deliver us from our fate; and should
my words seem too harsh, extreme, then please
remember where we lie, and forgive me."

ON LYKAS, A THESSALIAN HOUND

Bitch-hound, hunter, even your dead white bones
terrify the beasts of the field,
for your bravery is common knowledge
from huge Pelion to far Ossa
and on the dizzying sheep-paths of Kithairon.

HALCYON DAYS*

During the winter solstice
Zeus orders fourteen days of peaceful weather,
and man has called this windless season holy
for then the mottled halcyon rears its young.

* The halcyon nests about the time of the winter solstice, and that is why, when the weather is fine at that time of year, we call the days "Halcyon days."

Aristotle, History of Animals

THE GREEK PERIOD

ON A STATUE OF PHILON

I am from the island of Corfu.
My name: Philon, son of Glaukos.
And I am here,
because down in Olympia, at the games,
I was champion in boxing two years running.

VICTORY SONG FOR THE BOXER GLAUKOS OF KARISTOS

Neither the knockout king Polydeukes
nor even Herakles (iron boy of Alkmena)
would put up his guard to the mighty Glaukos.

A MODEST GRAVE

Sir, you are not looking at the tomb
of some great Lydian king,
for being poor my gravestone is small,
yet still too much for me.

ON THE GIRL GORGO

As she lay dying in her dear mother's arms,
Gorgo wept and whispered her last words:

"Stay with my father,
and on a better day bear a second daughter
who will care for you when you are old."

ENCIRCLED WOMAN

I am possessed by the fierce noise
all around me
of the purple, tormented sea.

HUMAN BANKRUPTCY

I who lie here, Brotachos of Gortyn, was born in
Crete,
and I did not come here for death but weighty busi-
ness.

THE GREEK PERIOD

SACRED HEALTH

Not even fine lucid wisdom
will bring you joy
when sacred health is gone.

FLUX

If you are a simple mortal, do not speak
of tomorrow, of how long this man will be
among the happy; for change comes quickly:
sudden as the dragonfly's shifting course.

GREEN

The birds of the spring
are singing nightingales
with their green necks.

ON DEMIGODS: FOR LYSIMACHOS OF ERETRIA

Born half-divine and sons of mighty gods,
not even these, living in ancient times,
came to old age unscorned and without painful
hardships—nor did they escape the end.

ON AN ATHENIAN DAUGHTER GIVEN TO A FOREIGN PRINCE IN LAMPASKOS

This dust lies on Archedike, daughter of Hippias,
despot of Athens and most princely Greek of his
day.

Although a daughter, wife, sister and mother of
tyrants,
she never yielded to snobbery; her heart was
humble.

PASSAGE OF TIME

One thousand years, ten thousand years
are but a tiny dot,
the smallest segment of a point,
an invisible speck.

THE GREEK PERIOD

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Without the gods,
man or city can achieve nothing.
God alone is all-knowing. And men
accomplish nothing without misery.

There is no evil
which man may not expect. And soon,
God overthrows the little done.



Lasos of Hermion



Born about 545 B.C. in the Argolid, he lived at the court of Hipparchos in Athens. A rival of Simonides in choral poetry, he also wrote hymns and dithyrambs.

The flute player Skopelinos taught Pindar the flute, and finding his pupil of exceptional ability, passed him on to Lasos of Hermion to learn the lyre.

THOMAS MAGISTER, *Life of Pindar*

Lasisms: sophistries as the sophistries
or entangled arguments of Lasos.

HESYCHIOS, *Glossary*



TO THE MERMIONIAN DIMITRA

I sing of Dimitra, wife of Klymenos,
and I lead
a choral hymn of honey voices
with all the low notes in the Aiolian harmony.

Apollodoros



Active during the late sixth century B.C.

Under these omens Pindar turned to the art of poetry, his teacher being either Lasos, as said before, or the Athenian Agathokles or Apollodoros. We are told about Apollodoros that when he was the leader of the cyclic chorus, he had to leave the city and entrusted the training of the chorus to Pindar, still a boy, who did so well as to become known throughout the area.

EUSTATHIUS, Introduction to Pindar

~~~~~  
WHO?

Who can be coming to the edge  
of my gates  
at this black hour of night.

## Timokreon



*Born on Rhodes, active during first half of fifth century B.C. He sided with the Persians in the wars and visited their king. Timokreon, who crossed poetic swords with Simonides, was reputed to be a glutton. He composed lyrics and elegies.*

When Timokreon became the guest of the Persian King, he took full advantage of the food offered him. Once, when the King asked why he was stuffing himself, he answered, "So I can give a great number of Persians a sound thrashing." The next day he defeated a large number of them, one by one, and then stood beating the air. He explained to his astonished host that he had all these blows to spare if any one would come on for more.

*ATHENAIOS, Doctors at Dinner*

After drinking and eating and slandering to my heart's content, I now lie here, Timokreon of Rhodes.

SIMONIDES



### THE SOURCE

Blind money, I wish you were banished  
from coastal plains and the sea,  
from the deep continent,  
and made your home on Acheron's shore  
in black Tartaros.  
For all the malevolence in man  
is caused by you.



## Lamprokles

*Active at Athens in early fifth century B.C., he composed dithyrambs and hymns, and was an influential teacher of music.*

Pythokleides was a musician of solemn music, a Pythagorean who taught Agathokles, the teacher of Lamprokles, the teacher of Damon.\*  
SCHOLIAST, on Plato

In the *History of Harmony*, Aristoxenos claims that the Mixolydian mode was invented by Pythokleides, the flute player. Lysis states that Lamprokles of Athens, understanding that this mode has a disjunction . . . arranged it to proceed from B to B.  
PLUTARCH, *On Music*



### ON ATHENE

City-destroying Pallas,  
wonderful captain in battle,  
constant champion of war,  
virgin, child of great Zeus,  
you tame unbroken stallions.

\* The teacher of Periklēs and Sokrates.

## Telesilla



*Fifth century B.C. poetess of Argos.  
She wrote hymns to the gods,  
mainly for women.*

No less reknown than these collective deeds is the battle in which the Spartan King Kleomenes was driven from Argos (with his men) by the poetess Telesilla.

PLUTARCH, *Feminine Virtue*

Above the theater is a temple of Aphrodite. And in front of the pedestal of the goddess is a slab engraved with a figure of Telesilla, the writer of songs. . . . Telesilla was famous among women for her poetry but still more famous for the following deed: (her defeat of the Spartans).

PAUSANIAS, *Description of Greece (Argos)*



### REFUGE FROM RAPE

O Artemis and your virgin girls,  
come to us. Run swiftly  
to escape the hunter Alphaios.

### SONG TO APOLLO

O the sun-loving Apollo!

## Korinna



*Boiotian poetess, elder contemporary of Pindar. She wrote narrative lyrics for a circle of women. Her dialect was chiefly Boiotian.*

Daughter of Acheloodoros and Hippokrateia, of Thebes or Tanagra; a pupil of Myrtis and a lyric poet. It is reported that she gained victory five times over Pindar in poetry competitions. She wrote five books as well as Inscriptions and Lyric Nomes.

SUIDAS, *Lexicon*

When Pindar the poet competed at Thebes he ran into ignorant judges, and was defeated five times by Korinna. To show the judges' bad taste, Pindar called Korinna a pig.

ÆLIAN, *Historical Miscellanies*

When Pindar was still young and proud of his mastery of language, Korinna censured him for his poor taste.

PLUTARCH, *Glory of Athens*



### ON HERSELF

I, Korinna, am here to sing the courage of heroes and heroines in old myths.

To daughters of Tanagra in white robes,  
I sing. And all the city is delighted  
with the clean water of my plaintive voice.

## THE GREEK PERIOD.

### THE CONTEST OF HELIKON AND KITHAIRON

Kithairon sang of cunning Kronos  
and sacred Rheia who stole her son  
Zeus, mighty among immortals.

Then the Muses asked the gods to put  
their ballot stones in the gold-flashing  
urn. All stood up and Kithairon won

the greater part. Hermes shouted loud,  
at once proclaiming the sweet victory.  
The gods adorned his brow with flowers,

and Kithairon rejoiced. But Helikon  
was stunned with bitter rage, and tore  
a massive boulder from the mountain,

and shouting sorrowfully, hurled it  
down on thousands of mortals below.

### HERMES

When he sailed into the harbor  
his ship became a snorting horse.  
Hermes ravished the white city  
while the wind like a nightingale  
sang with the whirling war-axes.

### ROUT OF THE ERETRIAN FLEET,

For you alone, Tanagra,  
Hermes came to fight  
with his naked fists.

### ON MYRTIS

Although I was her pupil,

Even I reproach Myrtis  
of the crystalline voice.

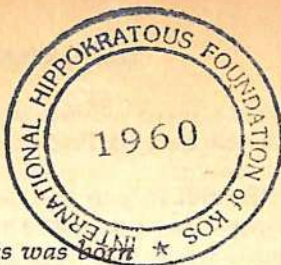
THE GREEK PERIOD

She was a mere woman poet,  
yet she challenged Pindar.

ON HERSELF

Will you sleep forever? There was a time,  
Korinna, when you were not a lazy sluggard.

## Pindar (Pindaros)



*The prince of choral poets was born in 518 in Boiotia of an aristocratic family. He was rival to both Simonides and Bakchylides, writing choral odes on commission throughout Greece and in Sicily. Pindar was a conservative, and aristocratic in politics and religion. His works comprised seventeen books, in all choral genres. Only the four books of his Epinikion odes have survived, with fragments of others. He wrote in a dense, highly personal style, blended from several dialects. The modern ode at its greatest is chiefly the descendant of Pindar. But, as Bowra says, "he was capable . . . at times, of a sublimity to which there is no parallel."*

A delight to strangers and loved by friends, Pindar was servant of the sweet-voiced Muses.

PLATO



## ECLIPSE

God has in his power  
to make dazzling unmixed light  
spring from the somber depths  
of evening. He can also  
enclose the white explosion of day  
under the gloom of black clouds.

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### SINGING DANCE\*

Follow the curving line of melody,  
and in contest  
dance frenetically to imitate  
the Amyklian hound or a wild unbroken horse.

And move your body  
as a hound flies across the windy plain of Dotia  
to kill a horned deer  
who, in desperate dance,  
bobs her head and neck convulsively  
to either side.

### OLYMPIAN ODE XII

*For Ergoteles of Himera, winner of  
the long distance run, 472 B.C., now  
exiled from Knossos.*

O daughter of liberating Zeus, I beseech you,  
O saviour Fortune, guard the strength of Himera.  
At sea you pilot our speeding ships,  
and on land the erupting wars and assemblies  
depend on your will. For men's hopes splash high,  
break low as they toss through an ocean of lies.

No man of the earth has ever encountered  
a sure sign from God of things to come. The future  
is blind to him. It teases  
his judgment: as the reversal of delight;  
or as after suffering a surge of pain  
the sudden turning from gloom to meadows of joy.

Son of Philanor, like a cock who fights only at home,  
even your legs' splendor might be dull  
had civil strife among bitter men  
not expelled you from your homeland, Knossos.  
Now, Ergoteles, garlanded at Olympia

\* Also attributed to Simonides.

## THE GREEK PERIOD

and twice festooned at Pytho and at the Isthmos,  
you honor the Hot Springs of Nymphs—here at  
your new home, Himera.

### AFTERLIFE IN ELYSIUM

For them the sun shines at full strength—while we  
here walk in night.

The plains around their city are red with roses  
and shaded by incense trees heavy with golden fruit.  
And some enjoy horses and wrestling, or table games  
and the lyre,  
and near them blossoms a flower of perfect joy.  
Perfumes always hover over the land  
from the frankincense strewn in the deep-shining  
fire of the gods' altars.

And across from them the sluggish rivers of black  
night  
vomit forth a boundless gloom.

### OLYMPIAN ODE XI

*To the Lokrian boy Agesidamos,  
winner in the boxing, 476 B.C.*

There is a time when men most need  
winds; there is a time for waters from the sky,  
for raindrops, the daughters of cloud.  
But if by effort a man is victorious, sweet songs  
foretell later fame,  
and are a pledge for remembrance of great achieve-  
ments.

Abundant is the praise waiting for Olympian  
victory, and my lips are pleased  
to shepherd these words.  
Yet only through God can wisdom blossom in a  
man's soul.  
So know this, Agesidamos,  
for you, son of Arcestratos, for your boxing

## THE GREEK PERIOD

triumph I will raise a sweet song to add radiance  
to your olive wreath of gold,  
and speak of the West Wind Lokrians, your people.  
Let us acclaim him here, Muses. I warrant  
you will not be received coldly like strangers,  
nor find bluntness to lovely things,  
but wisdom and excellent spearmen. For neither  
the fiery brown fox  
nor raucous lion can change his nature given from  
birth.

## LAMENT

The stars and the rivers  
and waves call you back.



## Bakchylides



Born on Keos. He was a contemporary, though perhaps somewhat younger, of Pindar. Like his uncle, Simonides, and Pindar, he wrote for numerous patrons throughout Greece. Bakchylides' works include various choral genres, of which fourteen epinikions and six dithyrambos (found in Egypt in 1896) survive in tolerable repair, along with other fragments.

Pindar had a feud with Bakchylides, and compares himself to an eagle and Bakchylides to a jackdaw.

SCHOLIAST, *On Pindar*

In this ode (*Pastor cum traheret*) Horace imitates Bakchylides.

PORPHYRIO, *On an Ode of Horace*

There are nine Lyric Poets: Alkman, Alkaios, Sappho, Stesichoros, Ibykos, Anakreon, Simonides, Bakchylides and Pindar.

EUSTATHIUS, *Introduction to Pindar*

It seems that the finest and most famous works of the ancients were also induced by Exile. The Athenian Thucydides composed his history of the war between Athens and the Peloponnesians near Skapte Hyle in Thrace. Xenophon wrote at Skyllös in Elis. The poet Bakchylides (from Keos) wrote in the Peloponnesos.

PLUTARCH, *On Exile*

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### PEACE

Only great peace  
brings wealth to men  
and a flowering of honey-throated song  
and to the gods  
ox-thighs burning and long-haired sheep  
flaming yellow on the sculpted altars  
and to the young  
a love of wrestling and the flute  
and Bacchic dance.

In the iron-covered shield  
the brown spider hangs his web.  
The sharpened spear and double-edge sword  
are flaked with rust.  
The noise of the brass trumpet is dead,  
and the honey of our dawnsleep  
is not dried from our eyelids.  
Streets clamor with happy outdoor banquets,  
and the lovely hymns sung by children  
spring like fire up into the bright air.

### THE WEST WIND

On his farmland Eudemos built this sanctuary  
to the Zephyr,  
kind breeze among the harsh gales,  
  
for when the farmer prayed,  
the wind awoke briskly  
helping him winnow good wheat from the chaff.

### HERAKLES

I must not sing of you now,  
O Pythian Apollo (though  
the lovely-throned Urania  
sent me a gold ship from Pieria  
cargued with famous hymns) if you are hunting  
far by the flowering bank of the Hebros

## THE GREEK PERIOD

or delighting in the soft song  
of the long-necked swan.  
Before you come to cull  
the bloom of paeans  
which the Delphian dancers  
chant loudly by your shining temple,

we will sing of Amphytryon's  
brave son who fled the city  
of Oichalia gutted by flames;  
who came to that wavewashed cape  
(where he was sacrificing nine deep-roaring bulls  
to the Kenaian Zeus of the broad clouds,  
a pair to the seagod who lifts  
salt waters and punishes earth,  
and a never-yoked high-horned ox  
to chaste Athene of the fierce glance)  
when a dread wargod wove  
a terrible poisonous weapon of blood

for Deianeira: she had learned  
the sorrowful news  
that the fearless son of Zeus  
was sending white-armed Iole  
to his luminous rooms to become his bride.  
O doomed insane wife! Why did she plot  
disaster! Relentless envy  
drove her against  
the black veil of future  
on that day she took  
(on the flowering bank of the Evenos)  
the star-cursed gift\* from the centaur Nessos.

### IDAS WINS MARPESSA

One day in spacious Sparta  
goldhaired virgins  
danced to a song

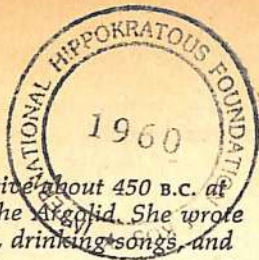
\* The centaur's blood poisoned by Herakles arrow in which jealous Deianeira dipped the shirt of her husband, Herakles, thinking it a love potent; the garment caused Herakles' death and her suicide.

## THE GREEK PERIOD

when courageous Idas  
led Marpessa of the violet braids  
to his own rooms  
after eluding death.  
Poseidon the sealord  
gave him a chariot  
and horses equal to the wind,  
and sent him to the handsome city of Pleuron  
and to the son of Ares of the gold shield.



## Praxilla



Poetess, active about 450 B.C. at Sikyon in the Argolid. She wrote dithyrambs, drinking songs, and hymns.

Praxilla was portrayed in bronze by Lysippos, although she spoke nonsense in her poetry.

TATIAN, *Against the Greeks*

Only a simpleton would put  
cucumbers and the like on a par  
with the sun and the moon.

ZENOBIUS



## OF THE SENSUAL WORLD

Most beautiful of things I leave is sunlight;  
after, is the glazing stars and the moon's face;  
then ripe cucumbers and apples and pears.

## APPEARANCE

You gaze at me charmingly through the window.  
Your face is of a virgin. Below you are a wife.

## ACHILLES

You understood their words,  
but they never reached the heart  
buried in your chest.

## THE COWARD

Under cover,  
a coward will strike from any side.  
I warn you, friend:  
watch out for his sting.  
Under every rock is a lurking scorpion.

## Plato (Platon)



Born about 429 B.C. in Athens and died in 347. He was a disciple of Sokrates, later the founder of the Academy, and in effect the father of Western philosophy. If he was in fact the author of the epigrams attributed to him, his *Phaedros* and *Symposium* may provide the spiritual link between his amatory epigrams and his philosophical works. "*Hesperos*" has been called the most perfect of all epigrams. Shelley prefixed it to his "*Adonais*."

You were the most accomplished stylist of the fine Attic tongue, and all Greek literature has no greater voice than yours. Inspired Plato, you were the first to contemplate ethics and life, looking to God and heaven. You combined the high thinking of Pythagoras with the cutting spirit of Sokrates, and were a beautiful monument of their solomn dissension.

ANONYMOUS, *Palatine Anthology*

If Apollo had not given Plato to Greece, how could he cure men's souls by writings? While Apollo's son Asklepios heals the human body, Plato heals the immortal soul.

Diogenes Laertios, *Palatine Anthology*

The golden bough of Plato's poems, forever divine, and shining with virtue.

from the *Stephanos of Meleagros, 1st poem*

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### HESPEROS

You were the Morning Star among the living.  
In death, O Evening Star, you light the dead.

### LOVE POEM

My child—Star—you gaze at the stars,  
and I wish I were the firmament  
that I might watch you with many eyes.

### THE APPLE

I am an apple, and one who loves you  
tossed me before you. O yield to him,  
dear Xanthippe: both you and I decay.

### LESSON FROM THE ACADEMY

I throw this apple before you,  
and if you love me purely,  
take it, and give up your virginity,

but ah, if you will not love me,  
keep the apple anyway,  
and ponder how long its beauty lasts.

### SOKRATES TO HIS LOVER

As I kissed Agathon my soul swelled to my lips,  
where it hangs, pitiful, hoping to leap across.

### THE FAMOUS COURTESAN LAÏS DEDICATES A MIRROR TO APHRODITE

I Laïs who laughed scornfully at Hellas,  
who kept a swarm of young lovers at my door,  
I lay my mirror before the Paphian,  
for I will not see myself as I am now,  
and cannot see myself as once I was.

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### ON LOVING ALEXIS

I barely whispered that Alexis was beautiful  
and now all the loose hounds goggle at him.  
My heart, why do you show the dogs a bone?  
Soon you'll suffer, as when you lost Phaidros.

### SOKRATES TO ARCHEANASSA

My girlfriend was Archeanassa from Kolofon  
and her wrinkles are scars of a sour love.  
Pain, horror. On her first voyage she loved  
a beautiful young man, and passed through fire.

### MODESTY

Aphrodite cried at Knidos when she saw Aphrodite:  
O Zeus! Where did Praxiteles see me naked?

### ON TIME

Time brings everything; and dragging years alter  
names and forms, nature, and even destiny.

### DEATH AT SEA

Sailors be free of disaster on land and sea,  
for you are passing by a sailor in his grave.

### PINDAR

A delight to strangers and loved by friends,  
Pindar was servant of the sweet-voiced Muses.

### SAPPHO

Some say nine Muses. Count again.  
Behold the tenth: Sappho of Lesbos.

### IN THE PINE GROVE

Sit below the high needles of the noisy pine  
as its branches shudder in the western winds.  
A shepherd's piping by the loquacious river  
will lay mammoth sleep on your spellbound eyelids.

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### PAN

Be still, green cliff of the Dryads. Be still,  
springs bubbling among rocks, and confused noisy  
bleating of the ewes.

For it is Pan playing on his honey-voiced pipe.

His supple lips race over the clustered reeds,  
while all around him

a ring of dancers spring up on joyful feet:

Nymphs of the Water and Nymphs of the Oak  
Forest.

### ARISTOPHANES

When looking for an inviolable sanctuary,  
the Graces found the soul of Aristophanes.

### ON A DOOMED SETTLEMENT IN MEDIA

We lying here in the open plains of Ekbatana  
once heard the throbbing waves of the Aigaion.  
Farewell famous Eretria,

once our country.

Farewell Athens,

our neighbor by Euboia.

Farewell beloved sea!

### ON A THIEF

You look upon a shipwrecked man. The sea killed me  
but was ashamed to strip me of my last garment.

It took a man's inglorious hands to rob me naked,  
a heavy sacrilege for such a shabby

gown. Let the poor wretch wear it down in Hell  
where King Minos may see him in my rags.

### EQUALITY OF DEATH

I am a sailor's tomb. Beside me lies a farmer.

Hell is the same, under the land and sea.

### CAPTIVITY IN PERSIA

We are Eretrians of Euboia, but we lie in Susa,  
and how remote, now, is our motherland!

## THE GREEK PERIOD

### INSCRIPTION FOR THE TOMB OF DION, TYRANT OF SYRACUSE

Tears were fated for Hekabe and Ilion's women  
from the day of their birth,

but Dion, just when you triumphed with famous  
works,

all your wandering hopes were cast down by the  
gods.

Now dead in your spacious city, you are honored by  
patriots—

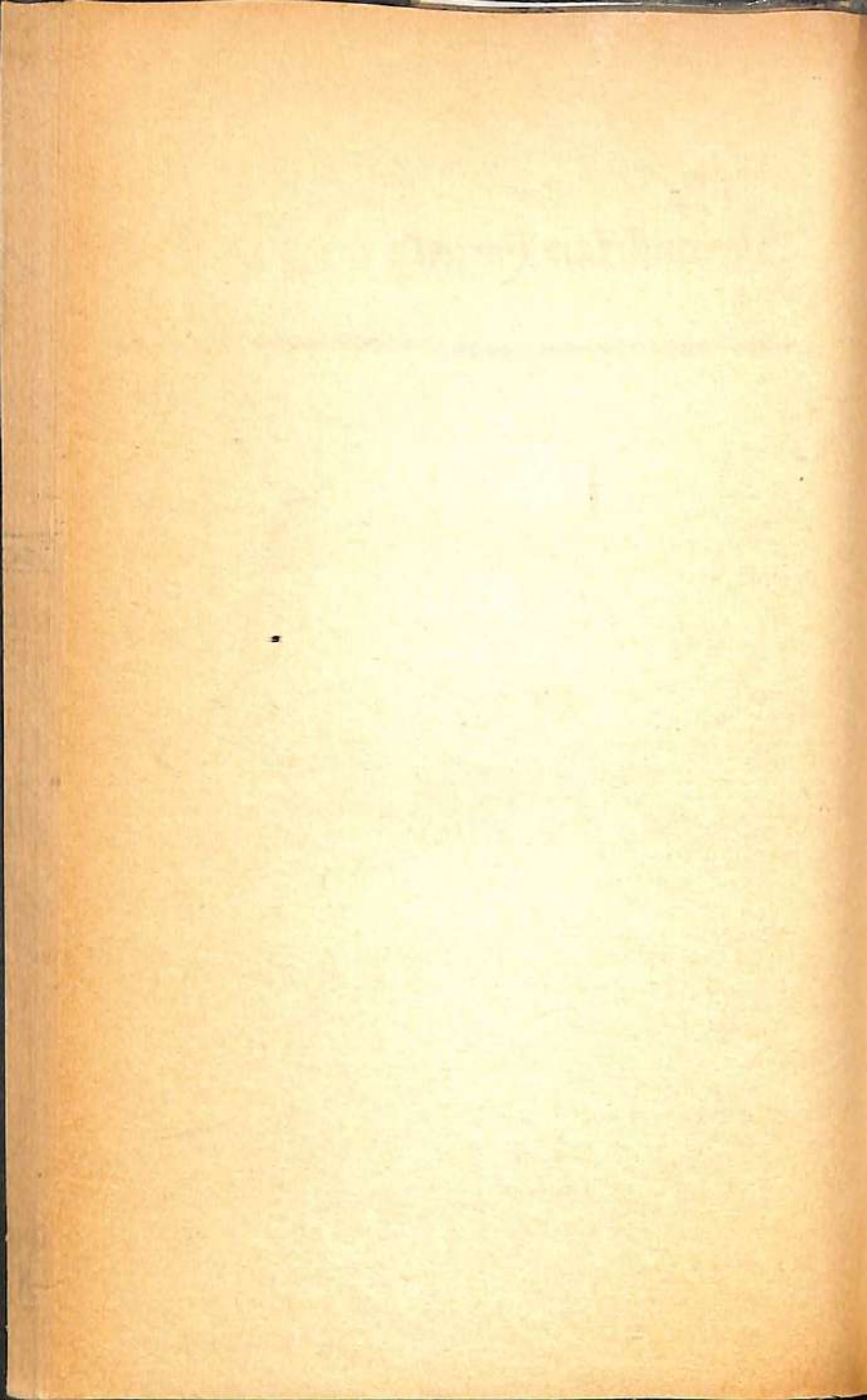
But I was one who loved you, O Dion!





*The  
Alexandrian Period*





## Kallimachos



Born about 305 B.C. in Cyrene in North Africa. He became a school-master in Alexandria, and then cataloguer of the royal library (the most famous library of ancient times). He produced a systematic catalog of the library which has been called "the first scientific literary history." Kallimachos was the center of a controversy over the proper length of a poem; he claimed that the long poem was an anachronism. The typical "learned" poet composing for a narrow, sophisticated audience, he was versatile, experimental, and prolific.

His known works include a long but episodic narrative-didactic poem in elegiacs, narrative hymns, iambics, miniature epics (epyllia), lyrics (of which little survives), elegies, dramas (lost), and—most important for lyric in the modern sense—epigrams.

The sweet myrtle of Kallimachos  
is always full of harsh honey.

*from the Stephanos of Meleagros, 1st proem*

### Epitaph on Himself

You are walking by the tomb of  
Kallimachos,  
who was accomplished in singing  
poems  
and knew when to laugh over his wine.

KALLIMACHOS, *Palatine Anthology*

## THE ALEXANDRIAN PERIOD

### EPITAPH OF A YOUNG BOY

Here Philippos the father buried his son  
Nikoteles,  
a child of twelve and his dearest hope.

### TWOFOLD GRIEF

It was morning when we buried Melanippos  
and by sundown Basilo his virgin sister  
was dead by her own hand.  
She could not bear to live  
after she had placed him on the funeral pyre.  
Their father's home displayed a double sorrow,  
its lovely children gone,  
and all Kyrene watched with downcast eyes.

### ON AN ELEGIAC POET

They brought me word of your death, Herakleitos,  
and I wept for you, remembering how often  
we watched the sun set on our lingering words.

My dearest friend from Halikarnassos,  
you lie elsewhere now and are only ashes,  
yet your nightingale songs will live,  
and the underworld that destroys all things  
will never touch them with its deadly hand.

### EPITAPH ON AN ENEMY

Passerby, do not wish me well with your bad heart.  
Go away. And I shall be well by your being gone.

## Anyte

*Active about 290 B.C. . . . Poetess of Arkadia in the Peloponnesos, she wrote epigrams, mock-epitaphs, and nature-poems in the Doric dialect.*



### REPOSE

Lounge in the shade of the luxuriant laurel's beautiful foliage. And now drink sweet water from the cold spring, so that your limbs weary with summer toil will find rest in the West Wind.

### EPITAPH OF A SLAVE

Alive, this man was Manes, a common slave.  
Dead, even great Darius is not his peer.

## A circular ink stamp from the International Hippocampus Foundation, dated 1960. The text "INTERNATIONAL HIPPOCAMPUS FOUNDATION" is curved along the top inner edge, and "1960" is in the center. Below the stamp, the words "d" and "d finest" are partially visible.

I am not the other Theokritos from  
Chios.\* I am  
Theokritos who wrote these poems  
and one of many  
Syracusans. Son of Praxagoras and  
noble Philinna,  
my muse is from my own native land.  
THEOKRITOS, *Introductory Poem to Idylls*



Goatherd, when you turn the corner by the oaks you'll see a freshly carved statue in fig wood. The bark is not peeled off. It is legless, earless, but strongly equipped with a dynamic phallus to perform the labor of Aphrodite.

A holy hedge runs around the precinct where a perennial brook spills down from upper rocks and feeds a luxuriance of bay, myrtle and fragrant cypress trees.

A grape vine pours its tendrils along a branch,  
and spring blackbirds echo in pure transparency  
of sound to high nightingales who echo back  
with pungent honey.

Come, sit down, and beg Priapos  
to end my love for Daphnis. Butcher a young goat

\* A fourth century B.C. orator and sophist.

## THE ALEXANDRIAN PERIOD

in sacrifice. If he will not, I make three vows:  
I will slay a young cow, a shaggy goat and a darling  
lamb I am raising. May God hear you and assent.

### DAPHNIS

Daphnis, you lie on the earth on some leaves  
resting your tired body.

The hunting stakes

are newly set in the hills. Pan  
is on your track, and Priapos comes with saffron ivy  
tied about his forehead. They are heading  
for your cave. Hurry!

Shake off your lethargy and run!

### OFFERINGS

These are gifts for Pan. And Daphnis  
who plays country tunes on a warbling pipe—  
he of the milk-white skin—gave them:

his double reed, a staff for hunting hare,  
a fawn hide and keen javelin. And a pouch  
of leather in which he once carried apples.

### SACRIFICIAL GOAT

Morning-wet roses and the redolent thyme  
are for ladies of Helikon.

But laurel trees  
with black leaves

that grace the precipice at Delphi  
are for you, Apollo: Pythian Healer.

The horned he-goat lowers his white body  
as he grazes on the tips of sagging terebinth.  
His blood will soon spill across the altar.

## Leonidas of Tarentum

*Lived during the third century B.C.*

Far from my Italian soil I lie, far  
from my land of Tarentum; and  
this is more bitter to me than death.  
Such is the intolerable life of a  
wanderer. But the Muses loved me,  
and I have more honey than bitter  
fruits. The name of Leonidas goes  
unforgotten. His gifts from the  
Muses proclaim it as long as there  
is sun.

LEONIDAS OF TARENTUM,  
*Epitaph on Himself*

### FAIR WARNING FROM PRIAPOS

The season for sailing. Already the chattering  
swallow  
returns with the slender West Wind.  
The meadows bloom, and the boiling waves of the  
sea,  
whipped by gales, are smooth and silent.  
Come then, sailor, haul in the anchors and loosen  
the hawsers  
and sail with all the canvas flying.  
It is Priapos, god of the harbor, who warns you  
now:  
set out from this port for foreign cargoes.

### SUMMER THIRST

Traveler, do not drink the warm water  
from this pool,  
all muddy from the quick mountain brook  
and the intruding sheep.

THE ALEXANDRIAN PERIOD

Go a little further up the hill  
where the heifers are grazing,  
and there by a shepherd's pine  
you will find  
bubbling up through the porous rock  
a spring colder than northern snow.





When the wind dips calmly over the blue sea  
my cowardly soul stirs. My love for land  
becomes a craving for the vast salt waters.  
But when the ocean bottom roars, and foam boils  
spitting skyward on the wild crashing waves,  
I gaze at the shore and its forests, and shun  
the sea. Then I love black earth and shadow-  
deep woods where even during a blasting gale  
a pine tree sings. What a wretched life  
the fisherman has—with his berth a home,  
the sea his labor and fish his wandering prey!  
I prefer to sleep under a leafy plane  
and hear the plashing of a bubbling spring  
which soothes the soul and never disturbs.

## Asklepiades



*Active about 270 B.C. in Alexandria. Asklepiades was the originator of much of the traditional imagery of love poetry, including Cupid's arrows.*

---

### SNOW IN SUMMER

Snow in summer on a dry tongue  
                  is sweet,  
and after winter sweet for the sailor  
                  to see the spring stars,  
but sweetest when one cloak shelters  
                  two lovers,  
and Kypris is praised.

### PRUDENCE

Save your maidenhead? What's the good?  
My girl, down in Hades there are no lovers.  
The pleasures of Kypris are for the living.  
Once past Acheron, the river of darkness,  
we shall lie as bones and dust.

### NEGRESS

Didyme plunders me with her beauty.  
When I look at her I am wax over fire.  
If she's black, what of it? So are coals.  
When kindled, they glow like blooming roses.

### ON A MAN-DEVOURING WHORE

Voracious Philainion bit me. The bite doesn't show  
yet groaning pain crawls to my very fingertips.  
Love, I am drained, done in, dead! I fell half-sleeping  
upon a viperous whore, and her embrace was death.

THE ALEXANDRIAN PERIOD

TO ZEUS

Snow, thunder, hail, blaze and blacken the earth,  
shake all the ponderous clouds,  
kill me and I will stop—but let me live  
and however bad you treat me,  
I shall be drugged by love. For Aphrodite  
was also your master, Zeus,  
when you stormed as gold rain through a bridal  
window  
to shower down on lovely Danaë!



## Mnasalkas

Of Sikyon, flourished about 250 B.C. \* SON



## AT THE TEMPLE OF APHRODITE

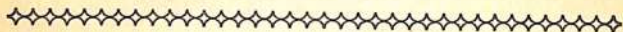
Let us stand on this low beach by the crashing surge  
and gaze at the holy groves of the sea-born  
Cyprian; at the bubbling spring under shadowy  
poplars  
where a shrilling kingfisher dips its bill.

## Bion

*One of the last of the Greek bucolic poets, Bion lived during the late second century B.C. He went from Smyrna to Sicily where, according to tradition, he was poisoned by jealous rivals.*

Nightingales mourning in the thick foliage, carry word to the Sicilian springs of Arethoisa that the cow-herd Bion is dead. And with him song and Dorian poetry have likewise perished.

UNKNOWN PUPIL OF BION,  
from *Lament for Bion*



## HESPEROS

Evening Star, gold light of Aphrodite born in  
the foam,  
Evening Star, holy diamond of the glassblue night,  
you are dimmer than the moon, brighter than  
another star.  
Hello, good friend!

I'm on my way to serenade  
my shepherd love. Give me your rays in place  
of moonlight.

There was a new moon today, but quickly set.  
I am no thief, no highway man to plague a  
traveler at night.

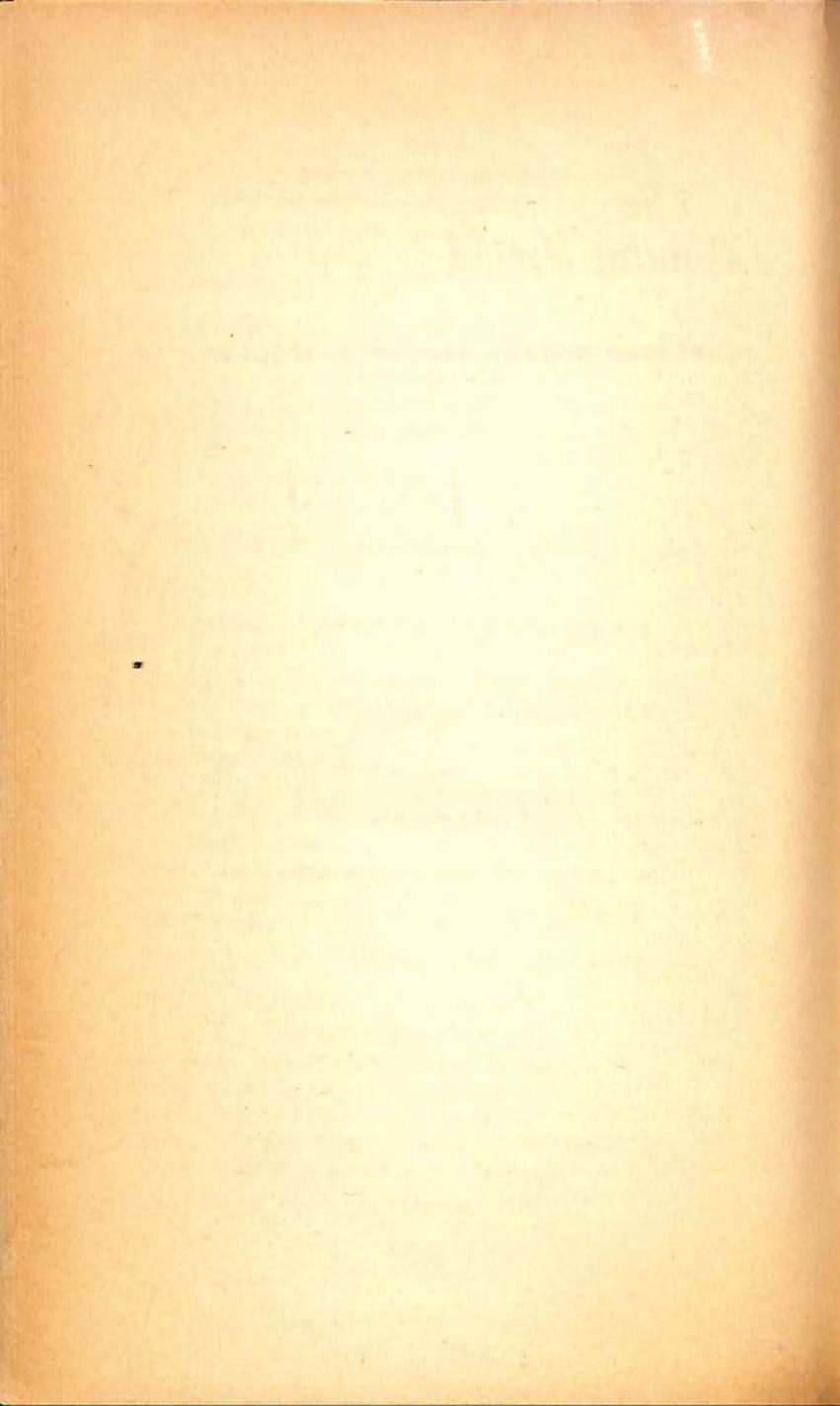
A lover I am. And those in love must be helped.

## POLYPHEMOS

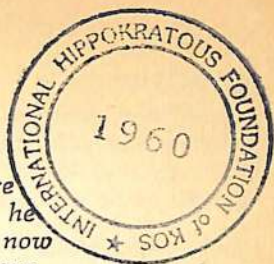
What will I do? I'll just go my way  
across to that distant hill and down  
again to the sandpits on the shore.  
And I'll sing quietly to myself  
my prayer for Galateia, who doesn't care.  
Yet till the shattering end of old age  
I will never once abandon sweet hope.

*The  
Roman Period*





## Meleagros



Lived about 140-70 B.C., at Tyre and on Kos. As a philosopher, he wrote Cynic satirical sermons, now lost. He collected the first serious anthology of epigrams, and more than 130 of his own epigrams survive; these are mainly erotic, and written in the florid and complex "Asian" style.

My nurse was the island of Tyros.  
And Attic land of Syrian Gadara was  
my birthplace. I was sired by Eukrates  
—I, Meleagros, friend of the Muses  
and first to waken to the Graces of  
Menippos. A Syrian? What if I am?  
Stranger, we all live in one country:  
the world.

Out of one Chaos were all men born.  
In my old age I traced these letters  
on the slab before my grave,  
knowing that old men are neighbors  
to Death. Passerby, wish me well, the  
talkative old man, and may you also  
reach a loquacious old age.

MELEAGROS, *Sepulchral Epigrams*, P.A.



### SHINING FOE

O morning star, bright enemy of love,  
how slowly you turn around the world  
while Demos lies warm with another  
under her cloak.

But when my slender love lay on my chest,  
how swiftly you came to stand above us,  
drenching us with light that seemed to laugh  
at our loss.

## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### LOVE'S WAGES

Heavy soul, now you bellow with fire,  
now recover your cool breathing.  
But why cry? When you harbored Love,  
you knew he would rise against you.

So be resigned to fire and snow;  
you sheltered him, and this is your pay.  
You must suffer now for being a fool,  
as you sizzle in boiling honey.

### MYISKOS

By Love, I swear it!  
Tender are the boys whom Tyros nurtures.

Yet Myiskos is the sun,  
and when he illuminates the world  
bright stars fade under his light.

### AFTER CHARYBDIS

Where are you driving me,  
foul waves of love,  
huge sleepless winds of jealousy,  
turbulent sea of orgy?

The rudder of my heart is broken:  
I drift.  
Will I ever again see  
the voluptuous Scylla?

### FLOWERS FOR HELIODORA

White violets I will weave  
with myrtle and tender narcissus;  
I will weave laughing lilies too,  
and soft crocus and purple hyacinths  
with roses, flower of lovers,

that I may come to decorate her brow  
and brighten her perfumed hair  
in a rain of flowers.

## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### LIGHT OF BEAUTY

The flowers looped in Heliadora's hair darken  
but she glows brighter as the flowers fade.

### A THIEVING SKY

Morning Star, herald of dawn: goodbye,  
and come back swiftly as the Evening Star,  
bringing her, clandestinely, whom you stole.

### THE WINE CUP

The wine cup is happy. It rubbed against  
warm Zenophila's erotic mouth. O bliss!  
I wish she would press her lips under my lips  
and in one breathless gulp drain down my soul.

### LOVE ON THE BLUE WATER

Asklepias adores making love. She gazes at a man,  
her aquamarine eyes calm like the summer seas,  
and persuades him to go boating on the lake of love.

### HELIODORA'S FINGERNAIL

Your fingernail, O Heliadora, was grown by Love  
and sharpened by him. How else could  
your mere scratching be a claw against my heart?

### THE KISS

Your eyes are fire, Timarian, your kiss birdlime.  
You look at me and I burn. You touch me and I stick.

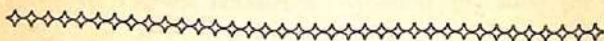
### SOLE TENURE

Zenophila, my flowering tree, you are asleep.  
Though wingless, I would come like Hypnos,  
and bury myself under your eyelids—  
so that even sleep might not intrude,  
and I alone possess you.

## Philodemos the Epicurean



*Lived about 110-40/35 B.C. A teacher and popularizer of Greek philosophy for the Romans, he was to influence Vergil and Horace. Approximately twenty-five of his epigrams survive in the Anthology.*



### THE PRIVATE LIFE OF PHILODEMOS

Philenis, fill our silent confidant—  
the lamp—with olive dew. Then go,  
and lock the stout door behind you,  
for love abhors a breathing witness;  
and you, sweet Xantho, let us begin . . .

Only my couch, a friend to lovers,  
will know the secrets of Aphrodite.

### AN AGELESS LOVER

Charito is more than sixty  
yet her hair is still a dense forest  
and no brassiere holds up the marble cones  
of her high-pointed breasts.  
Her unwrinkled flesh exhales ambrosia  
and myriads of teasing charms.

Lovers, if you do not run from hot desire,  
enjoy Charito  
and forget her many decades.



## Diodorus

The poems under this name in the Anthology, according to highest authority (Wilhelm Schmid), can be attributed to any of three different men.



## THE FALL

A tiny child in the villa of Diodoros  
fell headfirst from a little ladder  
and broke his neck bones fatally,  
but when he saw his much loved master  
running up,  
he suddenly spread out his baby arms to him.

Earth, do not lie heavy on the bones  
of a tiny slave child.  
Be kind to Korax, who died at two.

## Antipater of Thessalonika



*Flourished at the beginning of the  
Christian era. Some eighty of his  
epigrams are in the Anthology.*

---

### MORNING GRAY

Morning gray is here, Chrysilla, and long ago  
the twilight cock began to herald jealous Dawn  
and guide her by my window.

Go away, selfish bird!

You drive me out of home to the crowded chatter  
of young men.

Tithonos, you're getting old.

Why else have you chased your bedmate Dawn  
so early from her couch?

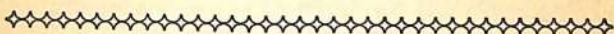
### A DOUBLE GRAVE

Neither the sea nor land may claim my body.  
In this death, they share me in equal parts.  
The fish devoured all my flesh in the sea,  
but my bones were washed up on this cold beach.

## Marcus Argentarius



*Lived at the beginning of the Christian era. He was probably a penniless speech teacher. "The liveliest of the Graeco-Roman epigrammatists," Gilbert Highet has said of him.*



### DIALOGUE

"Take a hard look at skinny Dioklea,  
she's a fleshless Aphrodite,  
but with a sweet disposition."

"Then nothing will stand between us;  
when I fall on her thin breasts,  
I'll lie right next to her heart."

### DISCREET WITNESS

As I lay clutching Antigone's body,  
my chest throbbed against her bosom,  
my lips pressed into her sweet lips—

for the rest you must ask the lamp.

## Roufinos

Lived sometime between 50 B.C.  
and 50 A.D.



A LETTER FROM ROUFINOS IN EPHESOS  
I Roufinos wish my darling Elpis only pleasure,  
if you are happy away from me.  
Yet I swear before you: I am wracked with pain  
without you in my lonely bed.  
With moist eyes I go to the hill of Koressos  
or the temple of great Artemis.  
Tomorrow when my city receives me, I will fly  
to greet you with a thousand blessings.

### A NAKED BATHER

A silver-ankled girl was bathing in a brook,  
letting the water flood down  
on the gold apples of her milky breasts.

When she walked, her round hips rolled and flowed  
more liquid than the water.  
Her arm reached down to shield her swelling belly,  
not all—but all her hand could hide.

### REMORSE

If women were as enticing after, as before,  
no man would be bored with his wife's body.  
But after love, all women are distasteful.

## Apollonides



*Lived sometime between 50 B.C.  
and 50 A.D.*

---

### THE MESSAGE

If you come to Apollo's harbor at Miletos,  
bring Diogenes this desolate word:  
off the island of Andros was a shipwreck,  
and your son Diphilos, bloated with waves,  
lies on the earth bottom of the Aigaion Sea.



*Lived sometime between 50 B.C.  
and 50 A.D.*



Zeus bought Danaë with golden rain  
and I purchase you with a gold coin.  
I can't, after all, pay more than Zeus.



## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### ENIGMA

Who knows when Diodoros is yawning or farting?  
For above and below, his breath is the same.

### POPULAR SINGER AND A BIRD'S DEATH

Deadly is the singing of the night-raven,  
but when you, Demophilos, break into song,  
even the night-raven croaks.



## Lucilius (Loukillios)



*Epigrammatist of the middle of the first century A.D. He was expert at the sharply pointed joke and lampoon; Nero was his patron.*



### SHOPPING TIP

Lady, you went to the market  
and picked up hair, rouge, honey, wax and teeth.

For a like amount  
you might have bought a face.

### GOSSIP

Some have passed the word you dye your hair.  
They lie, Nikilla,  
for in the open market  
you bought it raven black.

### ON THE HARD LUCK OF DIOPHON

Diophon was being crucified,  
but when he saw another near him on a higher  
cross,  
he died of envy.

### LOVE OF LEARNING

Zenonis gives a place in her home to Menander  
a bearded grammarian,  
for she has delivered her son to his instruction;  
and the bushy pedant even labors into night,  
with the mother,  
practicing their figures, her dangling participles  
and his copulative verb.

## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### A MONEYLOVER

When misery Kriton wants to ease his cramping  
stomach  
he sniffs not mint  
but a copper penny.

### ON HERMON THE MISER

After spending some money in his sleep,  
Hermon the miser was so hopping mad,  
he hanged himself.

### CONTAGION

Demostrates walks in a halo  
of armpit aroma,  
but worse,  
she makes those who smell her  
exhale the same he-goat fumes.

### NIGHT CALL

Diophantos went to bed and dreamed of  
Dr. Hermogenes,  
and though he was wearing a good-luck piece,  
he never woke up.

### ON THE SAME HERMOGENES

The barber is perplexed.  
Where can he start to shave the head  
of this hairy Hermogenes  
who—from head to toe—  
seems to be all head?

### EPITAPH OF A PUGILIST

We his grateful opponents erected this statue  
to *Apis a thoughtful boxer*  
who even when clinching never hurt any of us.

## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### ON BOXERS

Here you see the ruins of a former Olympic star.  
Once he had a real nose, mind you, a chin, forehead,  
ears,

and eyes (lids and all)  
and then he went pro.

He scrambled everything,  
even his share of his father's estate.  
For his kid brother showed up  
(a spitting image of the former champ)  
and the pug  
(who looked like an outsider now)  
was quietly but sternly ushered away.

### A PRECAUTION

Lazy Markos dreamt he was running, running,  
running. . . .

Out of fear he might run again  
Markos never went back to bed.

### THE QUEST

We were searching for the giant Eumekios.  
We found him sleeping with his arms outstretched,  
all under a tiny saucer.

### A PROSTITUTE BATHING

A girl of a hundred and still in the *métier*,  
Heliodora, you spend hours in the bath.  
But I know your dream: you pray to grow young,  
like old Pelias, by letting them boil you alive.

### INSIDE AN ATOM

So skinny was the pin-head Markos  
that he bore a hole  
with his own skull  
through an atom of Epikuros  
and slipped inside.

## THE ROMAN PERIOD

### FIDELITY IN THE ARTS

Eutychos the portrait painter got twenty sons,  
but even among his children—never one likeness.

### THE POET DESCENDING

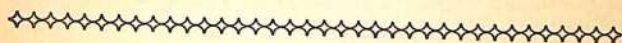
Eutychides the lyric poet is dead.  
Escape! you who inhabit the underworld,  
for he comes with odes,  
and orders thirteen lyres and twenty crates of music  
to burn beside him on his funeral pyre.  
Now Charon has you, and good,  
for where can you hide  
since Eutychides is established in Hell?



## Leonidas of Alexandria



*Wrote between A.D. 55 and 85.  
Nero and later emperors were his  
patrons. More than forty of his  
epigrams are in the Anthology.  
Thirty are composed in such a way  
that the letters of each couplet in  
a poem, if given a numerical  
value, produce the same total.*



### THE PUNISHMENT

The grape-stealer Hekatonymos  
    ran all the way down to Hades  
        flogged with a stolen vine switch.

## The Emperor Trajan



*Lived from 53 to 117 A.D. He was one of the best of Rome's emperors. For the ruling classes at Rome, Greek was, like French in modern times, a mark of one's sophistication.*



### A NATURAL SUNDIAL

If you point your big nose sunward  
and open your gaping  
mouth,  
all who pass by  
will know the time of day.



## Lucian (Loukianos)



*Born about 120 A.D. in Samos, in Syria; died sometime after 180. An itinerant teacher of rhetoric and Cynic philosophy, he was also the author of numerous satirical dialogues and other writings, including the fabulous True History, which influenced (among others) Rabelais and Swift.*

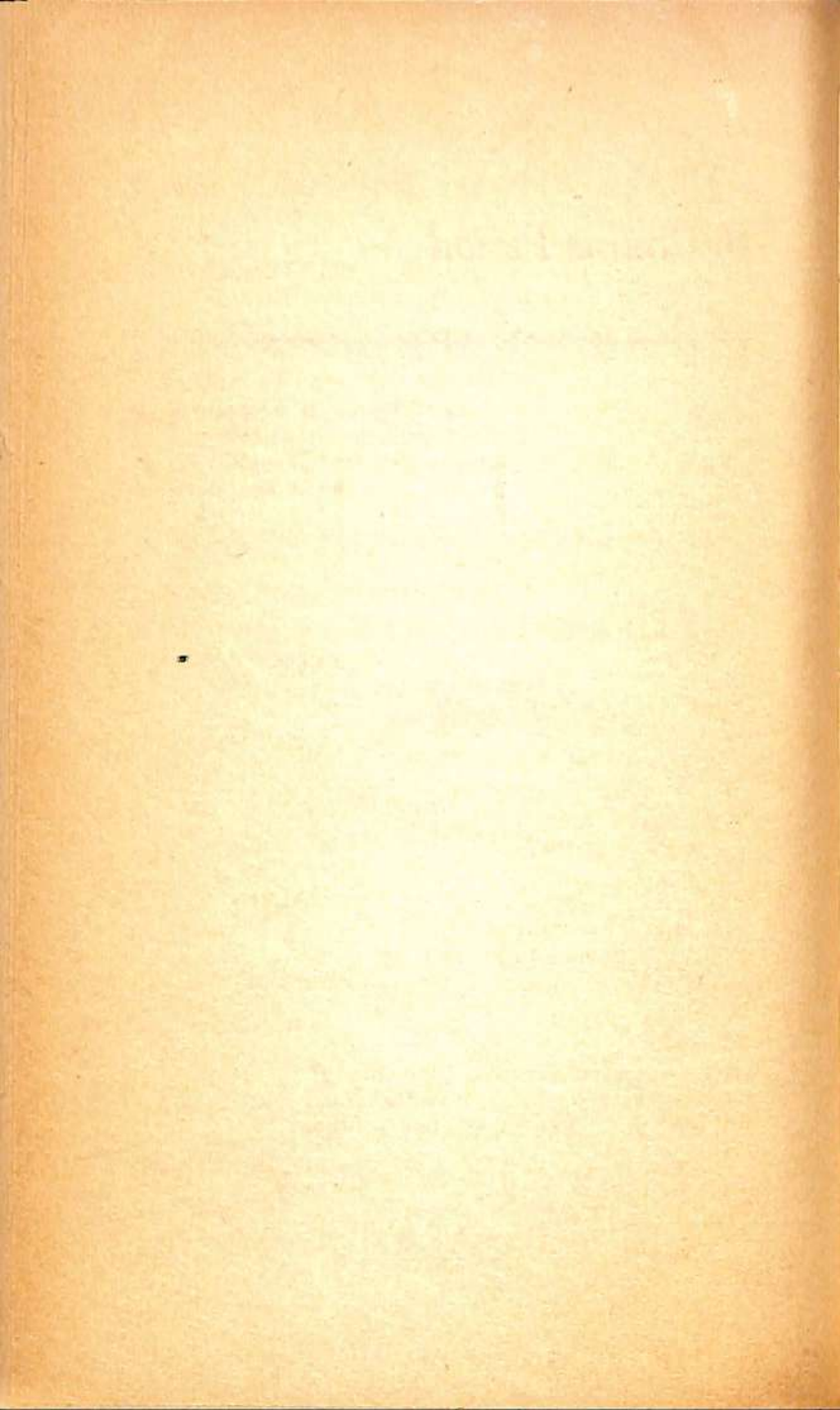
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### ON MAGICAL WHISKERS

If by growing a goatee you hope to come  
upon wisdom,  
then, O wise friend, any smelly goat in  
a handsome beard  
is at once Plato.

*The  
Byzantine Period*





## Palladas



*Active about 400 A.D. An impoverished schoolmaster at Alexandria, a pagan among Christians, he wrote more than 150 epigrams, most of them hopeless and bitter.*

---

### HER GLORIOUS HOUR

A woman will gnaw at your bile  
Yet she has two fine seasons:  
                    one, in her bridal bed;  
                    two, when she is dead.\*

### HERITAGE

A grammarian's daughter made love with a man,  
and the poor creature gave birth to a child  
who was, in orderly sequence:  
                    masculine, feminine, & neuter.

### ON THE RHETOR MAUROS

I was thunderstruck

on beholding Mauros, Professor of Rhetoric,  
raise his elephantine snout  
and spew murder in a voice  
made from lips weighing one pound apiece.

### ON MONKS

If solitary, how can they be so many?  
If many, how again are they solitaires?  
O crowd of solitaires feigning solitude!

\* θαλάμη and θανάτω. an example of internal rime, occasionally used in Greek, especially for humor and satire.

## THE BYZANTINE PERIOD

### THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

We all are watched over and foddered for death  
like a herd of pigs absurdly butchered.

### A PAGAN IN ALEXANDRIA CONSIDERS LIFE UNDER CHRISTIAN MOBS WHO ARE DE- STROYING ANTIQUITY

Is it true that we Greeks are really dead  
and only seem alive—in our fallen state  
where we imagine that a dream is life?  
Or are we truly alive and is life dead?

### GRAVE WARNING

Sir, you talk a lot, and after a short span  
are laid out in the earth.  
Keep silent  
and while you are alive, meditate on death.

Julianus, the Prefect of Egypt

*Active during the sixth century A.D.*



ON A YOUNG WIFE

O black winter of savage Death  
that froze the spring of your unnumbered charms.  
The tomb tore you from brilliant day  
in this, your bitter sixteenth year.  
Your husband and father—blind with grief—  
Think of you, Anastasia, who were our sun.

GIFT FROM THE DEAD

Your dear husband, Rodo, erects a monument  
of shining marble to redeem your soul;  
he gives money to the poor—for, kindest of wives,  
you died early and gladdened him with freedom.

AT ANAKREON'S TOMB

I often sang this, and even from the grave I shout:  
Drink, for soon you must put on this garment of  
dust.

ON ANAKREON

A. You died from filling your paunch with wine,  
Anakreon.

B. But I enjoyed it, and you who do not drink will  
also find yourself in Hades.

## Paulus Silentarius



*An official at the court of Justinian  
ca. 560 A.D. He wrote about eighty  
epigrams in the Anthology, in-  
cluding some of the liveliest love  
poems.*



### VISIONS

A man bitten by a mad hound, they say,  
sees an image of the beast in the water.

Is Love then wild with rabies?  
Did he gash me with his bitter tooth  
and ravage my spirit with his heat?

For now I see your darling form mirrored  
in winecup, river, whirlpool and the sea.

### TABOO

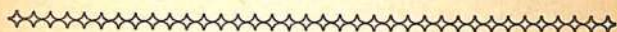
My fingers on her breasts, our mouths joined,  
I graze with deep fury on her silver neck;  
yet though I labor over Aphrogenia  
this virgin lets me go so far—and denies  
me her bed.

Her upper body she allows  
to Aphrodite, but her under parts she commits  
to chaste Athena. I waste away between.

## Agathias Scholastikos



*Lived from 536 to 582 A.D. He was a lawyer of Byzantium, and compiler of the epigram-anthology which was the basis for the existing Greek Anthology. Agathias was a friend of Paulus Silentarius but not his poetic equal.*



### INTIMATE DIALOG

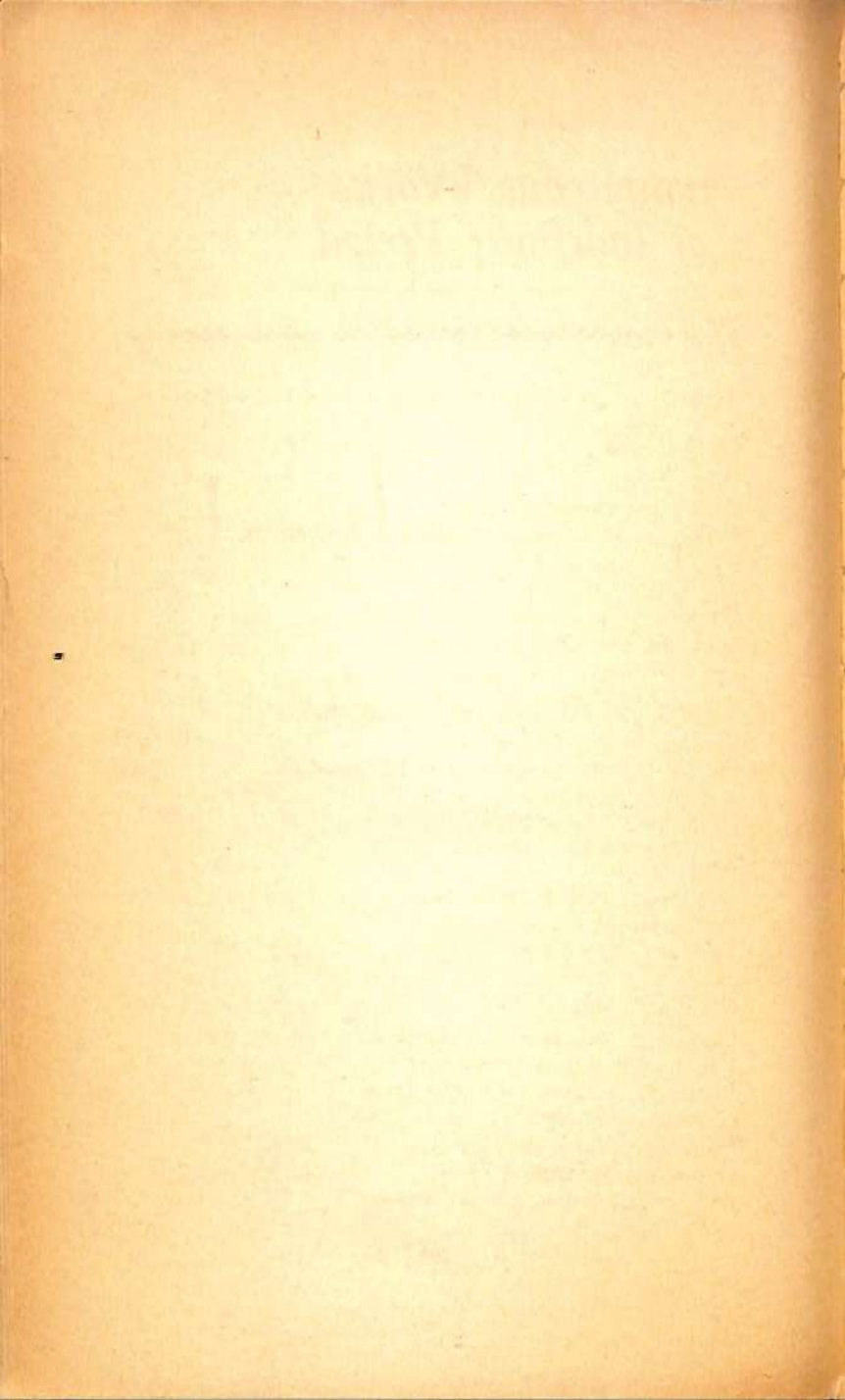
- A. What are you groaning about?  
B. I am in love.  
A. With whom?  
B. A virgin.  
A. Is she beautiful?  
B. To me she's lovely.  
A. Where did you first see her?  
B. At a dinner party. I found her lying on the same couch with me.  
A. You hope to have her?  
B. Yes, yes, my friend, but I don't wish to broadcast it. I want a quiet secret affair.  
A. You want to avoid lawful marriage then.  
B. You see, I have learned that she isn't worth a dime.  
A. You know this already? You are not in love, my friend. You are a liar. How can your heart be torn by love when it calculates so accurately?



*[The following text is extremely faint and illegible, appearing to be several paragraphs of handwritten or printed script.]*

*Anonymous Works  
of Indefinite Period*





## Anakreontea



*These imitations, long attributed to Anakreon, were written between the first century B.C. and the sixth century A.D.*



### OLD MAN

In a dream,  
Anakreon, singer of Teos,  
looked at me and laughingly addressed me.  
And I ran up to him  
and embraced him and kissed him.  
He was an old man but beautiful,  
beautiful and fond of wine.  
His lips smelled of grapes.

Though he was already old and quaking,  
Eros drew him by the hand.  
He slipped the wreath from his head  
and gave it to me.  
It smelled of Anakreon.

And I stupidly took it  
and tied it to my forehead,  
and ever since  
have not stopped loving.

### A PEACEFUL PARTY

Bring Homer's lyre, but mute  
the chords of murderous war.  
Bring me goblets with the laws  
of proper revelry.  
I will get drunk and dance  
at our wine-slopping feast,  
and roar on my sonorous lyre—

ANONYMOUS WORKS OF INDEFINITE PERIOD

yet with a tempered fury.  
Bring Homer's lyre, but mute  
the chords of murderous war.

BY THE RUB OF LOVE

Once while plaiting a wreath  
I found Eros among the roses.  
I grabbed him by the wings  
and dipped him in the wine  
and drank him down.  
Now inside my limbs  
he tickles me with his wings.

PLAY BEFORE DYING

"Anakreon, you are old,"  
the women say to me.  
"Look in the mirror, you  
haven't one lonely patch  
on your abandoned temples  
or desolate pate." Yes,  
I haven't looked to see  
if my hair is fallen out,  
yet I know only this:  
an old man must have love  
the closer he moves to death.

TODAY

I don't care for Gyges' wealth,  
the king of fabled Sardis,  
for I find gold repulsive.  
I don't envy the despots—  
but live to soak my beard  
in perfumes; have roses hang  
in my hair. Day is my gold.  
Who knows what time will bring?  
So while there is sun, drink  
and shoot craps; offer a toast  
to Bacchus. Tomorrow, sickness  
may come and cancel your wine.

A NUISANCE

What can I do to you,  
verbose swallow? Shall I  
clip your agile wings  
or slit your sharp tongue  
like a heartless Tereus?  
Why do your morning cries  
rip me from my dreams  
of my tender Bathyllos?

BARGAIN

A young fellow was hawking  
a wax image of Cupid.  
I went up to him, saying:  
"How much for the statue?"  
He answered in Doric:  
"Whatever you have,  
just so I can get rid of him.  
I'm no wax sculptor,  
and I'm sick of living  
with this grabby Cupid."

Okay, Cupid, set me on fire—  
or you'll melt in the flames.

ARITHMETIC

If you know how to count  
all the leaves of trees,  
all the waves in the sea,  
I will make you the sole  
accountant of my loves.  
Mark down twenty from Athens,  
and throw in fifteen more.  
From Corinth a small army  
(Achian women are splendid!)  
From Lesbos, Ionia, Karia and Rhodes  
2,000 completed affairs.  
Does my numeration overwhelm you?

## ANONYMOUS WORKS OF INDEFINITE PERIOD

I haven't mentioned Syrian loves  
or those from Egypt and Crete  
where love runs wild in the cities  
and every refinement is known.  
Shall I count out as well  
my loves from beyond Gadeira,  
from far Bactria and India?

### A WOMAN

Nature gave the bull horns  
and nimble hooves to horses,  
springing legs to the hare,  
a chasm of teeth to lions.  
She furnished fins to fish  
and speckled wings to birds.  
To man she offered wisdom.  
Was nothing left for woman?  
Yes, yes, she gave her beauty  
in place of shields and swords,  
and her beauty glides in victory  
over virile swords and fire.

### STRATAGEM

You chant of Theban battles  
or the slaughter before Troy.  
I tell of my disaster,  
It was no horse or hoplite,  
no black vessel in the port.  
A new weapon hobbled me:  
two eyes stuck me to the bone.

### THE TEST

Eros came and struck me  
with his hyacinth rod  
and ordered me to come.  
We crossed uncrossable  
torrents; forests, cliffs.

We raced, dripping sweat:  
my heart was in my mouth,  
my body nearly dead.  
Then Eros touched my forehead  
with his deft wing, and spoke:  
"Are you unable to love?"

#### BEFORE THE SHADOWS

Lying on a soft bed  
of myrtle and lotus  
I want to drink.  
Eros, get your apron on,  
tied with papyrus ribbon,  
and pour my dark wine.  
Like a swift wheel  
our life speeds past  
and soon we will lie:  
dust of scattered bones.  
Why waste those perfumes  
on the soil by my grave?  
While I live, bring flowers  
and my lovely mistress.  
Before my somber climb  
down to death's choir,  
I would forget my grief.

#### THE MIDNIGHT GUEST

Once in the frozen hours of night  
While the Great Bear circled Arcturus  
and mortals lay drugged with sleep,  
Eros stood at my gate, knocking.  
"Who is pounding on my door?" I said.  
"You are splitting my dreams."  
"Open up. I'm only a child.  
Don't be alarmed," Eros called in.  
"I'm dripping wet and lost  
and the night is black and moonless."  
Hearing his words I pitied him

and straightway lit a candle,  
and opened the door to see a boy  
with bow, wings, and quiver.  
I sat him down by the fire  
and warmed his hands with my own,  
and squeezed water from his hair.  
When he recovered from the cold  
He said, "Let's test this bow.  
Rain has weakened the string."  
He drew and struck me square  
in the groins like a gadfly.  
He lept up laughing with scorn:  
"Stranger, now let us be happy.  
My bow is unharmed, but you  
will have trouble in your heart."

CICADA

We bless you, cicada,  
high in the branches.  
You sip a dew drop  
and whistle like a king.  
What you see is yours:  
all the soft meadows  
and furry mountains.  
Yet you do no harm  
in the farmer's field,  
and men exault you  
as the voice of summer.  
You are loved by Muses  
and Apollo himself  
who gave you clear song.  
Wise child of the earth,  
old age doesn't waste you.  
Unfeeling and bloodless  
you are like a god.

GOLD, DEATH, WINE

If gold could buy life,  
I would guard my wealth

with jealous desire,  
and when death came  
he would take some  
and leave me alone.  
Yet being mortal  
I cannot prolong  
my life, so why  
should I cry or moan?  
If we must die,  
what good is gold?  
So bring sweet wine,  
and when I've drunk  
bring my good friends.  
I'll lie on a soft bed  
and be lost in love.

### REFLECTION

How good it is to roam  
on the ripe grassy meadows  
where the sweet wind drifts;  
and look at the grapevines,  
and lie under the leaves  
with a soft girl in my arms  
who is willing and warm.

### SPRING

Spring comes: see where  
Graces leave the rose,  
how the ruffled sea  
smooths into peace,  
the water-duck dives,  
how the crane soars.  
The hot sun burns up  
the somber clouds;  
fields shine with crops  
and olive trees bud.  
Everywhere the flood  
of swollen grapes  
flowers in the vineyard.

ANONYMOUS WORKS OF INDEFINITE PERIOD

ADAPTABILITY

Once the daughter of Tantalus  
became a stone on the Phrygian hills,  
and the daughter of Pandion  
flew into the sky as a swallow.

I wish I were a mirror  
so you would look at me.

I wish I were a tunic  
so you would always wear me.

I should like to be water  
so I could bathe your body.

I would become myrrh  
so I could anoint you.

I would gladly be a bandeau  
for your breasts, a pearl

for your throat, a sandal—

if you would be sure to step on me.

DRUNKARD

The black earth drinks  
and trees suck rain.

The seas drink brooks  
and sun the sea

and moon the sun.

Why do you rage, friends,  
when I want to drink?



## Miscellaneous



### ON A DROWNED SAILOR

Do not ask, mariner, whose tomb I am,  
but chance your life upon a kinder sea.

### PLEASURE\*

To praise is the highest good, and censure  
is the beginning of hatred,  
yet to speak maliciously of one's neighbor  
is, after all, Attic honey.

### A BITTER TALE

After eating little and drinking less,  
I suffered the pains of lingering disease.  
I have lived long and now am dead. I say:  
a curse on you all!

### METAMORPHOSIS

I wish I were a scarlet rose  
so you might lift me in your hands  
and pull me to your snowy breasts.

### AGING LOVER'S APPEAL

Please—keep old age  
away a while longer,  
O beautiful Aphrodite.

### BY THE SEA

If I were the wind  
you might walk slowly along the shore  
and remove your dress  
and, as I blow, take me to your naked breasts.

\* Sometimes attributed to Palladas.



PROKLOS

Proklos cannot wipe his nose with his hand,  
his arms being shorter than the wild snout,  
and when the poor thing sneezes, he won't even  
say,

Zeus preserve us!

He cannot hear his nose,  
his ears being O so far away.

BREVITY

The rose blooms for a brief season. It fades,  
and when one looks again—the rose is briar.

EPITAPH OF THE PHILOSOPHER EPIKTETOS

I was a slave: crippled in body and poor  
as the beggar Iros—and loved by the gods.

HER UNIQUE VIRTUE

Under this slab I rest, famous among women,  
having opened my legs for one man alone.

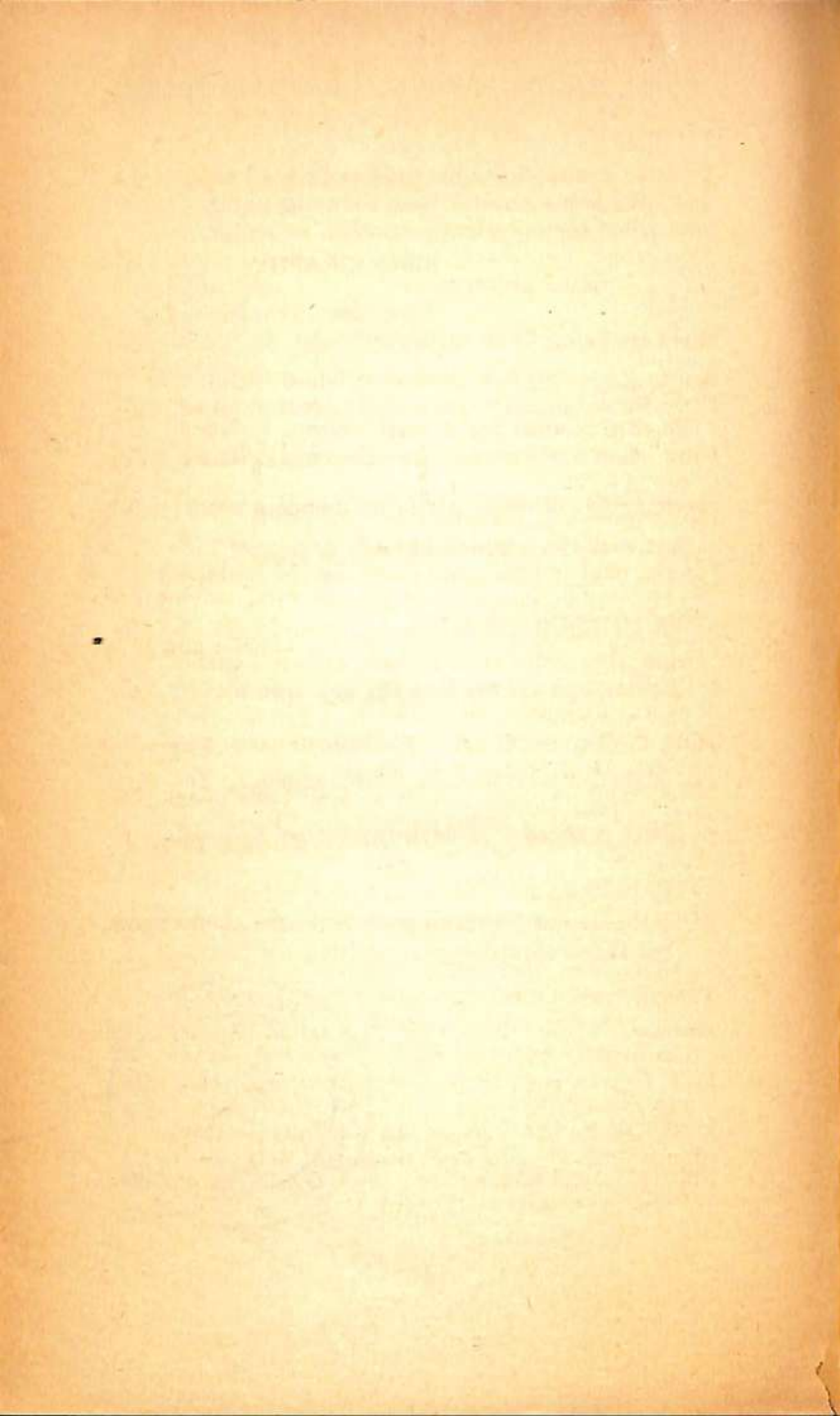
ON DIONYSIOS OF TARSOS

At sixty I, Dionysios, lie in my grave.  
I was from Tarsos,  
I never married and wish my father had not.

THE EXPECTATION

I no longer mourn those gone from the sweet light  
but those who live ever waiting for death.





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2

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