

Greek Lyric: The Individual and Society

Alan Haffa

Poetic Evolution

- **Lyric** arose most likely out of **Epic**; early lyric makes use of dactylic hexameter in the **7th century**.
- Early themes are **martial in nature**, much like epic.
- The **Choruses of tragedy** are lyric (a variety of metres) and the dialogue is iambic trimeter.

Meter

- Vowels are lengthened or shorted by **vowel length** and by what syllable follows
- Variation in meter: **Vowel lengths may be resolved** (broken up into smaller bits) or contracted (two smaller become one long)
- Last syllable is usually Free
- **Caesura**: when a word ends in the middle of a foot

Performative Context

- **Oral**—with a specific audience
- **Symposium, religious, wedding, maiden ceremony, military celebration**
- **Instrumental** accompaniment: **lyre, aulos**
- Different from epic:
 - **Contemporary** topics
 - **Personal** themes
 - **Short**
 - **Variety of different meters** used

Archilochus: <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/archilochus.asp>

- Island of Paros, 7th century
- Colonist to Thasos, 660-650
- Fought in wars against neighboring Naxos and Thracians, possibly over gold
- Military themes; Erotic themes and Fertility Worship of Demeter
- Invented iambic trimeter and trochaic tetrameter.



Warrior and Poet

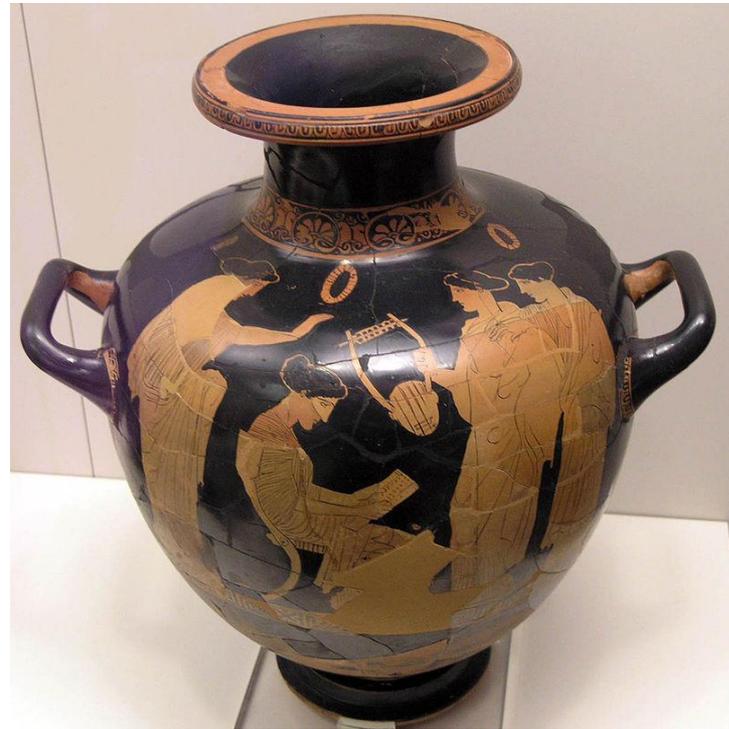
- “I am a companion both of Enyalios, the Lord of War, and the Muses, for I recognize the beauty of their gift.”
- “On my spear is my kneaded barleybread, On my spear is my Ismaric wine, on my spear I lean when I drink it.”
- Some Thracian glories in the shield, which I reluctantly left by a bush, a flawless piece. So what? I saved myself. Forget the shield. I will get another, no worse.”

Archilochus, Greek Moderation

- “Heart, reeling with sorrows, unsure what to do, stand and fight! Charge the hostile line headfirst. Be steady in ambush as enemies approach. Make no display of joy when you win; losing, do not collapse in tears at home. Enjoy the good times, regret the bad in moderation. Learn about life’s changing rhythm.”

- Born at Mitylene in **Lesbos**, late 7th c.
- Nine books were collected by Alexandrian scholars
- **Little is known about her for certain**
- Married and had children; but has strong love for women friends
- Wrote many different types of lyric

Sappho



It seems to me that man is equal to the gods, that is,
whoever sits opposite you

And, drawing nearer, savors, as you speak,

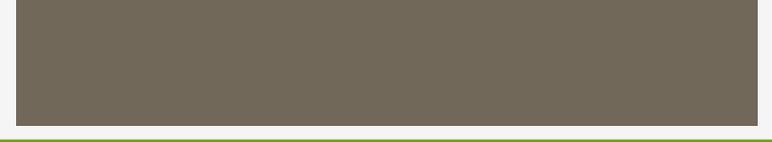
The sweetness of your voice

And the thrill of your laugh, which have so stirred the
heart in my own breast,

that whenever I catch sight of you,

even if for a moment, then my voice deserts me,

and my tongue is struck silent, a delicate fire



suddenly races underneath my skin,
My eyes see nothing, my ears whistle like
The whirling of a top
And sweat pours down me and a trembling creeps
over
My whole body, I am greener than grass,
At such times, I seem to be no more than
A step away from death;
But all can be endured since even a pauper...

Some an army of horsemen

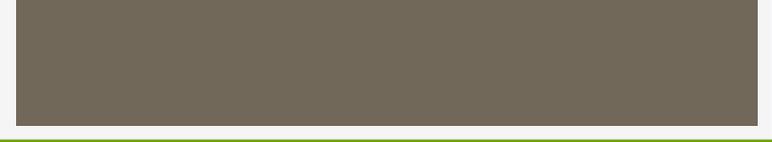
Some an army of horsemen, some an
army on foot

And some say a fleet of ships is the
loveliest sight

On this dark earth; but I say it is whatever
you desire:

And it is possible to make this perfectly
clear

To all; for the woman who far surpassed all
others in her beauty, Helen, left her
husband—the best of all men--



Behind and sailed far away to Troy; she did not
spare

A single thought for her child nor for her dear
parents

But the goddess of love led her astray to desire...

...which reminds me now of Anactoria,

Although far away,

Whose long-desired footstep, whose radiant,
sparkling face

I would rather see before me than the chariots

Of Lydia or the armor of men

Who fight wars on foot....

Alcman

- 7th Century, Spartan
- Books of **Choral songs**
- Appear to have been sung as part of ceremony for unmarried girls, ***partheneia***
- Like Sappho, these poems also appear homoerotic in theme although this was typically suppressed in translation
- Express admiration for Chorus leader, **Coryphaeus**

Maiden Songs, fragment

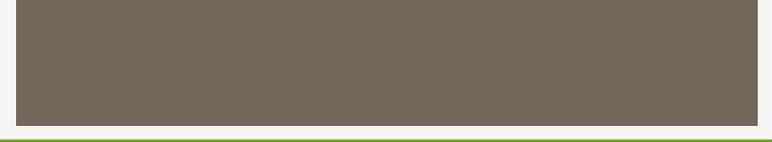
- For abundance of purple is not sufficient for protection, nor intricate snake of solid gold, no, nor Lydian headband, pride of dark-eyed girls, nor the hair of Nanno, nor again godlike Areta nor Thylacis and Cleësithera; nor will you go to Aenesimbrotas and say, 'If only Astaphis were mine, if only Philylla were to look my way and Damareta and lovely lanthemis'; no, **Hagesichora guards me** (alternative: "**wears me out with love**").

Alcman, Fragment 26

- O maidens of honey voice so loud and clear, my limbs can carry me no more. Would O would God I were but a ceryl, such as flies fearless of heart with the halcyons over the bloom of the wave, the Spring's own bird that is purple as the sea!
- A ceryl is a bird who were thought to carry their mate on their wings, when they were too old to fly

Tyrtaeus,

- Spartan
- Mid 7th century
- **Hortatory Poetry**
- **Sung by Spartan warriors** hundreds of years later
- **Dactylic hexameter; Uses Homeric vocabulary**



Do not desert your elders, men with legs
No longer nimble, by recourse to flight:
It is disgraceful when an older man
Falls in the front line while the young hold
back,
With head already white, and grizzled beard,
Gasping his valiant breath out in the dust
And clutching at his bloodied genitals,
His nakedness exposed: a shameful sight and
scandalous.

But for the young man, still
In glorious prime, it is all beautiful:
Alive, he draws men's eyes and women's
hearts;
Felled in the front line, he is lovely yet.
Let every man then, feet set firm apart,
Bite on his lip and stand against the foe.



Summary

- Greek Lyric is above all **metrical**
- It was accompanied by **Aulos and Lyre**
- It is **personal and contemporary** in contrast to the timelessness of Epic
- We see the **Individual emerge** in lyric
- **Love, war, honor, praise** are all common themes
- Many of the genres and meters will be important for later poetry