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GREEK  
IAMBIC POETRY



*Edited and Translated by*  
DOUGLAS E. GERBER

# GREEK IAMBIC POETRY

FROM THE SEVENTH TO  
THE FIFTH CENTURIES B.C.

藏书章  
EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY  
DOUGLAS E. GERBER



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## PREFACE

This volume aims at providing a text and translation of the main iambic poets contained in the second edition of M. L. West's two-volume *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* (Oxford 1989 and 1992). Omitted, however, are papyrus fragments too lacunose to provide anything intelligible, poets whose iambic fragments are included elsewhere in the Loeb Classical Library (e.g., Anacreon), and because of limitations of space the minor poets Aeschines, Aristoxenus, Asopodorus, and Euclides. Half-brackets are inserted only when it is important to indicate what is actually attested in the papyrus. I have not attempted to include all the testimonia, but only those which are significant. Similarly the apparatus criticus is reduced to what I have judged most important. In some instances a fragment is cited or referred to in several sources, but only the most important are given. The reader can find the others in West's edition. The numbering of the fragments follows West, that of the testimonia is my own. In my translations I have attempted to provide an English rendering which represents the Greek as closely as possible without being stilted or ambiguous.

It remains to express my deep gratitude to Professors

## PREFACE

Christopher Brown, Robert Renehan, and Emmet Robbins, who read and commented on substantial portions, and to Robert Fowler, George Goold, and Jeffrey Henderson, who provided assistance on a variety of details. Their generosity and expertise are much appreciated.

University of Western Ontario

Douglas E. Gerber

To Dianne  
*amicae carissimae et fortissimae*

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## INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the word iambus is unclear, but there is no doubt that *ἱαμβος* as a metrical term (⏏ –) is secondary and that in origin it described a type of poetry. This is indicated by Archilochus fr. 215, the earliest example of the word, where it can hardly refer exclusively to meter, whatever its precise force may be, and by the fact that the word could be used of trochaic tetrameters (e.g., fr. 111). Significant too is test. 3 (A col. III.38) where on a particular occasion Archilochus' poetry was described as *ἱαμβικώτερον*, "too iambic," clearly a reference to content rather than to meter (see below).

What type of poetry then does iambus signify?<sup>1</sup> Plutarch in his *Life of Cato* 7 states that Cato "betook himself to iambic verse, and heaped much scornful abuse upon Scipio, adopting the bitter tone of Archilochus, but avoiding his license and puerility" (Loeb translation). 'Scornful

<sup>1</sup> The nature and purpose of archaic iambic poetry have been examined in some detail by Christopher Brown in his contribution (pp. 13-88) to D. E. Gerber (ed.), *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (Leiden 1997), and my brief account here is deeply indebted to his analysis. His notes contain all the relevant bibliography, except for one item which came to our attention too late for inclusion, Krystyna Bartol's *Greek Elegy and Iambus. Studies in Ancient Literary Sources* (Poznań 1993).

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abuse,' 'bitter tone,' and (sexual) 'license': these are terms which are frequently used to describe iambus in general and in particular the poetry of Archilochus and Hipponax. The purpose of such poetry, however, is a more complex issue. With Hipponax, a century later than Archilochus, it appears that the purpose was primarily one of entertainment, although this assessment might well change if we had more information at our disposal. But with Archilochus there is evidence to assist us in reaching at least some tentative conclusions. Particularly revealing is the evidence of cult. A figure called Iambe appears in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (perhaps late seventh century) and indulges in insulting language, thereby causing the grieving goddess to laugh (vv. 202-204). Demeter does not play a prominent role in the surviving verses of Archilochus. She and Persephone appear in fr. 323, a fragment which West judges spurious, but test. 65 suggests that Archilochus' family had some connection with the worship of Demeter, and there is ample evidence that Demeter was a major deity in Paros.<sup>2</sup> Insulting or obscene language (*αἰσχρολογία*), so typical of iambus, was a common feature of festivals of Demeter.<sup>3</sup> In the *Hymn to Demeter* this insulting language is directed towards a goddess, a behaviour which is the opposite of what is normal in addressing a deity. Such inversion figures in other cults as well and, as Brown points out (p. 41), its purpose "is to re-affirm and strengthen the traditional structures of society and even

<sup>2</sup> See N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974), commentary on v. 491.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson pp. 213-17.

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the natural world. Normality is reinforced by experiencing its opposite.”

In addition to the cult worship of Demeter we should consider the possible connection between early iambus and Dionysus. One type of song especially associated with Dionysus is the dithyramb, a word which appears to contain the same root as iambus, and both Dionysus and dithyramb are present in fr. 120. Drunkenness too is present in the fragment and the early dithyramb seems to have been a riotous affair. There is ample evidence that phallic rites were a common feature of the worship of Dionysus and this association is almost certainly found in fr. 251. The source of this fragment is the inscription of Mnesiepes (test. 3) and the inscription goes on, unfortunately in a highly mutilated condition, to state that something, presumably the verses just cited, was “too iambic.” Apparently as a result of this criticism the citizens suffered a variety of disasters, until the Delphic oracle told them to appease the anger of Dionysus by honouring Archilochus. “Too iambic” cannot here refer to meter, since fr. 251, whatever its meter, is clearly not iambic. It must refer to the content of the fragment, in all likelihood to its obscenity. Whether the verses also contained insulting language cannot be determined.

It seems a reasonable deduction from all this that in festivals honouring both Demeter and Dionysus there were cult songs of an insulting and/or obscene nature and that from these a poetic genre, what we can call ‘literary iambus,’ was developed. What role Archilochus played in this development is unknown, but it may have been significant.

When we turn to the question how early iambus was de-

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livered, we have at our disposal only the evidence of much later sources. According to Pseudo-Plutarch, for example, "Archilochus introduced the practice whereby some iambs were spoken to musical accompaniment and others sung" (test. 47), but this is surely a deduction "based on the practice of later artists" (West, *Studies* 33). Musical instruments are mentioned in Archilochus (e.g., pipe and lyre in fr. 93a), but nowhere is there an indication that any instrument accompanied his verses. The more lyrical nature of epodes suggests that they were not simply recited and the same may be true for trochaic tetrameters and perhaps for iambic trimeters as well.

With regard to the occasion for the delivery of iambus, we are again lacking secure evidence from the extant verses, but it seems safe to say that one at least of the main occasions was the symposium.<sup>4</sup> The other was presumably festivals. Such is in fact the occasion named in the inscription of Mnesiepes (test. 3) just before fr. 251. We are told that Archilochus could be among those whose works were performed at poetic contests (test. 34; cf. also Plato *Ion* 531a and test. 67) and the same was said of Semonides (test. 4), but in the case of Archilochus it is not clear what meter (or meters) was involved nor is there any evidence that Archilochus himself participated in poetic competition.

<sup>4</sup> Much has been written in recent years on the symposium and it must suffice here to refer the reader to O. Murray (ed.), *Symptica* (Oxford 1990), and O. Murray and M. Tecusan (edd.), *In vino veritas* (London 1995).

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### *Archilochus*

Archilochus was born on Paros, an island in the Cyclades, in the first half of the seventh century (testt. 5-11). His father, Telesicles, was involved in the Parian colonization of Thasos, an island in the north Aegean close to Thrace, and Archilochus' poetry contains numerous references to Thasos and to hostilities between the colonists and Thracian tribes. His poetry also attests to hostilities between Paros and neighbouring Naxos. Many sources record that Archilochus was engaged to marry Neoboule, daughter of Lycambes, that the latter broke off the engagement, and that Lycambes, Neoboule, and one or more additional daughters hanged themselves as a result of the poet's bitter invective against them (see testt. 19-32). Several fragments record the invective, but none the suicide, and it is possible that this was based on verses, no longer extant, which asserted that suicide was the family's only recourse in light of Lycambes' actions. I see no reason to doubt the general veracity of Archilochus' feud with Lycambes, but Brown, who discusses the evidence in considerable detail (pp. 50-69), is surely right to see more than a purely personal response on the part of Archilochus. It must suffice here to quote his conclusion (p. 69): "Consideration of the Lycambes poetry has also provided some support for our earlier contention that the function of *ἱαμβος* was similar to that of the religious occasion in which it developed. Lycambes is revealed as an oath-breaker and thus a menace to society; the daughters are exposed as sexually incontinent and so deserving of opprobrium. By subjecting his enemies to invective Archilochus seeks to protect the

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community. However personal the insult, Archilochus treats his feud with Lycambes as a matter of public concern, and this public aspect seems to lie very near the heart of *ἰαμβος*."

Lycambes was not the only object of the poet's invective. In fact Archilochus was viewed as early as Pindar (test. 35) as the archetypal poet of blame and according to Critias (test. 33) this was directed against friends and enemies alike. The fragmentary nature, however, of what has survived does not allow us to determine the extent to which blame figured in his poetry. For example, before the publication of P. Oxy. 2310 we had only v. 2 of fr. 25 and it is only the papyrus which allows us to see that the poem contains invective.

There is some evidence that Archilochus belonged to a family involved in the cult worship of Demeter and Dionysus (see above and Brown 45-47) and long after the poet's death he was the recipient of heroic honours. An Archilocheion was established in Paros, and some of the inscriptions set up in it have been found (testt. 3-4). Archilochus was also the subject of two comedies, an *Ἀρχίλοχος* by Alexis and an earlier *Ἀρχίλοχοι* by Cratinus, and he is represented anachronistically as Sappho's lover in Diphilus' *Σαπφώ*. Unlike the other two major iambographers, Semonides and Hipponax, whose works were assembled in two books each by the Alexandrians, Archilochus is cited by such terms as elegiacs, trimeters, tetrameters, and epodes rather than by book number. For ancient works written on Archilochus see testt. 63-64.

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### *Semonides*

Although the evidence for Semonides' date is much less substantial than that for Archilochus', such evidence as there is points to the middle of the seventh century (testt. 1-3). Originally from Samos, he was involved in the colonization of Amorgos, an island at the eastern edge of the Cyclades. According to the *Suda* he composed elegiac as well as iambic poetry, but elsewhere he is cited as an iambographer, and only iambic verses have survived. The one elegiac fragment that some assigned to him has now been shown to be the work of Simonides (frr. 19-20 *IEG*<sup>2</sup>). Although our sources regularly refer to the iambic poet as Simonides, the grammarian Choeroboscus (test. 5) states that the proper spelling is Semonides. Whether this is correct or not, the distinction in spelling avoids confusion with the much better known lyric poet of the fifth century.

Except for frr. 1 and 7, nothing exceeding three verses has survived. Fr. 1 shows that iambics could also be used for serious meditation on life's vicissitudes, a topic more commonly reserved for elegiacs. Fr. 7, the longest iambic poem we have from the archaic period, describes ten types of wives, all of whom are said to be derived from different animals except for two which owe their origin to earth and sea. Only the last in the series, the bee woman, is praised and it is clear that only she enhances her husband's household. What follows, however, seems to indicate that all wives are a bane and Semonides may be suggesting to his audience that the bee woman is a mirage or at least extremely rare. Although the misogyny of fr. 7 is an appropriate topic for iambics, the tone is more reminiscent of

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Hesiod than of Archilochus. Fr. 7 seems to be derived in part from beast fable, as do some of the other fragments, and the fable appears in both Archilochus and Hesiod. In contrast to Archilochus, however, there is in Semonides' remains none of the Parian poet's harsh invective or obscenity.

### *Hipponax*

Hipponax can be assigned with some confidence to the middle of the sixth century (testt. 1-2). A native of Ephesus, he was banished by the city's tyrants and settled in Clazomenae. Ancient sources and several of the poet's fragments attest to bitter invective directed against the sculptors Bupalus and Athenis, especially the former, ostensibly because they caricatured his appearance. Although we have a substantial number of fragments, many are lacunose scraps of papyrus and brief citations of rare words by lexicographers. In spite of this, however, Hipponax is revealed as a forceful poet whose verses contain many colourful, foreign, rare, and obscene words. He is especially fond of depicting the lower levels of society and several fragments attest to his interest in composing parody, primarily of epic poetry. Like Archilochus he employed a variety of meters, but unlike the Parian poet his iambic trimeters usually end in a spondee rather than an iambus, thereby creating a limping effect; hence the term choliambic or lame iambic given to this meter. He was also not above combining iambic and dactylic meters in the same verse (e.g., fr. 35).



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Hipponax was much admired by the Alexandrians, especially Callimachus and Herodas, both of whom imitated his meter and style, and his virulent invective was the subject of several poems in the *Palatine Anthology* (testt. 7-10).

### *Minor Poets*

Not enough of the remaining poets in this volume has survived to enable us to form much of an impression of their works.

Ananius, homeland unknown, seems to have been roughly a contemporary of Hipponax, and the two poets are sometimes confused (see n. 4 on fr. 1). Both composed in choliambics and both occasionally included ischiorrhogic lines (see test. 2), the latter apparently being commoner in Ananius than in Hipponax. The only fragment of any length (fr. 5) is in trochaic tetrameters, ten verses on the best season of the year to eat certain meats and seafood.

Susarion of Megara, probably late 6th and/or early 5th century B.C., is credited in several sources with having invented comedy. Nothing, however, has survived, except for one iambic fragment which can hardly be from a comedy. On Susarion see especially West, *Studies* 183-84.

Hermippus of Athens, like Susarion, was also a comic and iambic poet (latter part of the 5th century), but much more has been preserved, especially of his comedies. The few iambic and trochaic fragments extant, in particular frs. 4 and 5, are characterized by puns and rare words.