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GREEK  
ELEGIAC POETRY



*Edited and Translated by*  
DOUGLAS E. GERBER

# GREEK ELEGIAC

POETRY  
FROM THE SEVENTH TO  
THE FIFTH CENTURIES BC

藏 书 章  
EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

DOUGLAS E. GERBER



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GREEK ELEGIAC POETRY

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## PREFACE

This volume aims at providing a text and translation of the elegiac poets contained in the second edition of M. L. West's two volumes, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* (Oxford 1989 and 1992). For various reasons, however, a number of poets have been omitted. West includes four of the Seven Sages (Bias, Chilon, Periander, Pittacus) who are reported to have composed elegies, but nothing has survived. Several of the poets in Campbell's *Loeb Greek Lyric* also composed elegies and these are included in his volumes. The poets involved and the location of their elegies in his five volumes are as follows: Anacreon (ii.146-49), Aristotle (v.218-19), Clonas (ii.330-33 s.v. Polymnestus), Echembrotus (iii.200-201), Ion (iv.360-67), Melanippides (v.14-15), Olympus (ii.272-73), Polymnestus (ii.330-31), Sacadas (iii.202-205), Sappho (i.2-7), Simonides (iii.506-19), Sophocles (iv.330-33), Timocreon (iv.94-97). Some minor poets were not included because of space limitations. Finally, Antimachus has been omitted, since it would be more appropriate to include his elegiac fragments in a translation of his entire remains.

I have not attempted to include all the testimonia, but only those that 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

## PREFACE

several sources, but only the most important are given. The reader can find the others in the editions of West or Gentili-Prato. 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 Christopher Brown, Leslie Murison, William Race, Robert Renehan, and Emmet Robbins, who read and commented on substantial portions. Their generosity and expertise are much appreciated.*

University of Western Ontario

Douglas E. Gerber

For Joan  
uxori singulari

# CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY	10
CALLINUS	
testimonia	14
text	18
TYRTAEUS	
testimonia	24
text	36
MIMNERMUS	
testimonia	72
text	80
SOLON	
testimonium	106
text	108
THEOGNIS	
testimonia	166
text	174



## CONTENTS

<b>PHILIADAS</b>	386
<b>PHOCYLIDES</b>	
testimonia	388
text	390
<b>DEMODOCUS</b>	404
<b>XENOPHANES</b>	
testimonia	408
text	412
<b>ASIUS</b>	426
<b>DIONYSIUS CHALCUS</b>	
testimonia	428
text	430
<b>EUENUS</b>	
testimonia	440
text	446
<b>CRITIAS</b>	
testimonia	456
text	460
<b>ADESPOTA</b>	472

## INTRODUCTION

In English the word 'elegy' has strong threnodic overtones, but that clearly is not true of most of the poems in this volume.<sup>1</sup> Almost any topic, apart from the scurrilous or obscene, was considered suitable for archaic elegy and in this period it is therefore more appropriate to define elegy as simply a poem composed in elegiac couplets.<sup>2</sup> Most of the poems in this volume were presumably composed for performance at symposia and therefore would seldom have exceeded 100 verses, but there is also evidence for elegies of much greater length, poems dealing with the history of a particular state,<sup>3</sup> although none of these has survived intact. In all likelihood these were delivered at public festivals, perhaps for competition. We have an in-

<sup>1</sup> The discussion that follows reproduces much that is in my section on elegy in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (Leiden 1997) 91-132. In addition to the bibliography cited there see K. Bartol, *Greek Elegy and Iambus. Studies in Ancient Literary Sources* (Poznan 1993).

<sup>2</sup> For a succinct account of its metrical characteristics see M. L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford 1982) 44-46.

<sup>3</sup> Mimnermus' *Smyrneis* (see fr. 13, 13a and test. 10) may be an example. See also Tyrtaeus test. 1 with n. 3. Simonides' elegiac poem on the battle of Plataea (fr. 10-17 *IEG*<sup>2</sup>) may well be of considerable length.

## INTRODUCTION

scription commemorating the victory in the Pythian games of 586 won by Echembrotus of Arcadia, "singing songs and elegies" (ἀείδων μέλεα καὶ ἐλέγους),<sup>4</sup> but we are not told of the content of these elegies.

In the passage just cited we have the earliest example of the word ἔλεγος (*elegos*). It next appears in Euripides and Aristophanes where the meaning is similar to that of its English derivative, namely, a poem or song of lamentation. This, however, is probably a later development, prompted perhaps by the regular practice in the fifth century of composing epigrams on the dead in elegiac couplets. In the inscription of Echembrotus there is nothing to indicate the contents of his elegies. The contrast with μέλεα (songs) may point to a difference in musical accompaniment, the former accompanied by a stringed instrument and the latter by a wind instrument, but it is also possible that *elegos* is here essentially a metrical term. Such is clearly the meaning in one of the earliest occurrences of ἐλεγείον (*elegeion*), since Critias (see fr. 4) states that Alcibiades' name cannot be accommodated ἐλεγείῳ, i.e., either to the elegiac couplet as a whole or more specifically to the pentameter. In the fourth century we meet the form ἐλεγεία (*elegeia*), as in the introduction to Solon frs. 4a and 4b, and here too it is a metrical term. In fact, *elegeion* and *elegeia* are essentially synonyms, denoting a poem or, in the plural, a collection of poems in elegiac couplets.

The etymology of *elegos* is unclear. The ancient lexicographers postulated a variety of derivations, and others have been proposed by modern scholars, the likeliest being a

<sup>4</sup> For the full text and a translation see Gerber, *Companion* p. 94, or Campbell's *Loeb Greek Lyric* iii.200 f.

## INTRODUCTION

derivation from Armenian *elegn*, reed. A reed instrument, the *aulos* (pipe or oboe),<sup>5</sup> was certainly used to accompany elegies at times and, although the evidence is somewhat problematic, I agree with those who argue that it provided the regular accompaniment.

### *Callinus*

Callinus was a native of Ephesus in Ionia and can be dated to the middle of the 7th century. Strabo (test. 1) claims that he is older than Archilochus because the latter referred to the destruction of the Magnesians, whereas Callinus mentions their prosperity; but only a short period may have elapsed between the two references. All the meagre remains of Callinus are concerned with warfare, especially the fighting against the Cimmerians who came down from the eastern area of the Black Sea into Phrygia and Lydia and succeeded in burning the temple of Artemis in Ephesus.

The one substantial fragment of Callinus is an attempt to rouse his countrymen from their inactivity and to display the utmost courage in battle. It is a fine example of martial poetry, superior to that of Tyrtaeus on the same topic.

### *Tyrtaeus*

A number of our sources (testt. 1-8) state that when the Spartans were embroiled in the Second Messenian War

<sup>5</sup> On the *aulos* see M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford 1992) 81-109.

## INTRODUCTION

(latter part of the 7th century) they received an oracle from Delphi to obtain an adviser from Athens, and the Athenians sent them Tyrtaeus, a lame schoolmaster. Whatever truth there is in all this, what has survived of his poetry is concerned primarily with two issues: exhortations to the Spartans to fight with the utmost bravery and support for the government of the state, probably as a result of civil strife arising from setbacks in the war.

The three longest fragments (10-12) describe the ideal soldier and the disgrace that attends those who are cowardly. Their poetic quality, however, is uneven. Although there is some striking imagery, there are also awkward transitions, repetition, and padding. Like Callinus' verses, there is indebtedness to epic language, but unlike Callinus, Tyrtaeus is not averse to following closely a lengthy Homeric passage, as a comparison between *Iliad* 22.66-76 and fr. 8.19-30 illustrates.

It is sometimes said that Tyrtaeus' poetry is representative of the only kind of literature that was accepted in Sparta in his time, but in fact in contrast to two centuries later there is ample evidence that the visual arts were flourishing and that several poets and musicians visited Sparta. In addition, we must remember that Alcman, also Spartan, was roughly contemporary with Tyrtaeus, and his poetry is very different.

### *Mimnermus*

The *Suda* (test. 1) assigns the poet's *floruit* to 632-29 and this seems to be substantially correct. In fr. 14 Mimnermus states that he learned from his elders of the

## INTRODUCTION

exploits of a hero who routed the Lydian cavalry and if this refers to the defeat of Gyges by the Smyrnaeans in the 660s, Mimnermus will have been born not long before. Mimnermus seems to be urging the citizens to emulate this hero and the occasion may be the attack of Alyattes, the fourth king of Lydia, who succeeded in razing Smyrna about 600.

In test. 1 the *Suda* gives Mimnermus' homeland as either Colophon or Smyrna, and in several sources he is referred to as simply a Colophonian. Fr. 9, however, and the fact that he composed a *Smyrneis* (fr. 13a) strongly suggest that he was from Smyrna. The error may have arisen from his having frequently mentioned Colophon. Also, in contrast to Smyrna "Colophon had a continuous tradition down to Hellenistic times" (West, *Studies* 72) and was the homeland of such famous poets as Xenophanes and Antimachus.

According to test. 9 Mimnermus' poems were collected in two books, but he is never cited from a specific book. Instead, we have six fragments (4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 24) assigned to a work entitled *Nanno* and one (13a) to a *Smyrneis*. Since the former embrace a wide range of topics, it is probable that the title *Nanno* was given to a collection of poems. The fact that the *Smyrneis* contained a proem in which the double genealogy of the Muses was given (fr. 13) suggests that it was of substantial length. If we are to believe testt. 3 and 4, *Nanno* was a pipe-player loved by Mimnermus.

Horace and Propertius (testt. 11-12) speak of Mimnermus as a love poet, but only fr. 1 has much to say on this topic and even here the emphasis is on the brevity of youth and the horrors of old age (as in fr. 2-5). Regardless of the

## INTRODUCTION

subject matter, however, Mimnermus is a consummate poet and it is not surprising that he made such an impression on Hellenistic and Roman poets.

### *Solon*

In the year 594/93 Solon was made archon in Athens and he lived until shortly after Pisistratus became tyrant in 560. Much of his surviving poetry falls into clearly defined periods: before his archonship, afterwards when he defends his reforms, and in his last years when he warns the Athenians against supporting Pisistratus. A ten-year period after his archonship was spent in travel, to Egypt and Cyprus (frr. 19 and 28).

Solon is not to be included among poets of the highest rank, but he also does not deserve the low esteem in which he is sometimes held. Fr. 4, for example, with its effective use of personification, imagery, anaphora, and chiasmus, reveals a high level of poetic skill. Fr. 13, however, the longest elegy we have from the archaic period and perhaps a complete poem, is of poorer quality. Because of its lack of cohesiveness it has generated a considerable bibliography, as critics attempt to explain the train of thought and central theme. But for all its imperfections it shows us a more reflective and philosophical Solon than we find in most of his other verses and thereby fills out our picture of the man.

Some of Solon's fragments are in iambic trimeters and trochaic tetrameters, but their contents do not differ from many in elegiac meter, an indication that the distinction usually found between elegy and iambus in Archilochus no longer applies.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Theognis*

Under the name Theognis is a collection of poems which most would agree represents an anthology containing genuine works of Theognis, selections from other elegists (e.g., Tyrtaeus, Mimnermus, Solon), and anonymous poems, together with numerous verses repeated throughout the corpus, usually with some slight variation. Disagreement arises, however, concerning how and when the anthology was formed and what segments should be assigned to Theognis.<sup>6</sup>

Almost nothing is known about Theognis the man, except that he was an aristocrat living in Megara during a period of political turmoil when class distinctions were breaking down. There is some evidence that he went into exile. The *Suda* (test. 1) dates his floruit to 544/41 and this may be substantially correct, but our uncertainty about the authorship of certain segments makes his dating highly problematic.

Many of the poems are addressed to a boy Cynrus, who is also called by his patronymic Polypaïdes, and in most instances these contain admonitions to abide by aristocratic ideals. Some critics treat the presence of Cynrus' name as proof of authenticity, but the name could easily have been added by someone who wished to pass off his verses as the work of Theognis.

The collection as we have it begins with four short invocations, followed by a very controversial segment (vv. 19

<sup>6</sup> On the formation of the anthology see the sensible remarks of E. Bowie in G. W. Most (ed.), *Collecting Fragments: Fragmente sammeln* (Göttingen 1997) 61-66.



## INTRODUCTION

ff.) in which the poet mentions a seal that is to be placed on his verses. This has the appearance of a prologue and in vv. 237-54 we seem to have an epilogue. The intervening verses are more cohesive than those which follow and 19-254 may represent in large part the earliest collection of his poetry. Finally, at some stage the pederastic segments were gathered together to form Book II.

Except for Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric Hymns, the elegies of Theognis represent the earliest poems to have been preserved in manuscripts of their own. Since these elegies are clearly not all the work of Theognis, it would be more accurate to refer to them as *Theognidea*, but I have used the term Theognis throughout.

### *Xenophanes*

Xenophanes is better known as a pre-Socratic philosopher, but only the elegiac fragments will be considered here. Born in Colophon about 565, he left when the Medes overran his city in the late 540s and spent the rest of his life in various places in Magna Graecia (see test. 1 and fr. 8). He died about 470.

In addition to the poems in hexameters, most of which are concerned with the nature of deity and with explanations of natural phenomena (wind, rain, celestial bodies), we are told that he also composed iambic poetry. None of this has survived, but we do have one fragment (see n. 5 on test. 1) consisting of an iambic trimeter followed by a dactylic hexameter, and hexameters interspersed with trimeters may have been more common, especially when the poem had the character of a lampoon (see n. 1 on test. 2).

The three major elegiac fragments have as their subject