

## The Panicked Alcaeus

This paper identifies Alcaeus's atmosphere of panic and urgency as a defining feature of his poetics. Anne Pippin Burnett (1983: 161) has already focused on the rawness of emotion which the poet displays in his more political fragments, acknowledging, for example, the "vortex of rage" into which Alcaeus compresses his feelings about the political crisis in his city of Mytilene in the late-Seventh Century BCE, when the aristocrat Pittacus transgressed traditional norms to amass power in the city. Meanwhile, Leslie Kurke (1994: 68) has found these fragments most useful as historical documentation of Mytilene's "rupture of its dominant discourse of the ruling aristocracy." My paper focuses less on this crisis itself and more on the language and rhythm which give Alcaeus's entire corpus an air of urgency. Observations on poetic time by Vanessa Cazzato (2016) and Gregory Hutchinson (2018) help me to argue that a hallmark of Alcaeus's fragments is his constantly appearing to be rushed, never at peace, within his lyric. This lack of peace, moreover, associates him with near-contemporary iambic poets such as Archilochus and Hipponax – an association suggested in the work of Malcom Davies (1985) and Ruby Blondell (2010) – and demonstrates a unique mode for Alcaeus's poetry between the iambic and lyric genres.

I begin my paper by considering Alcaeus's use of meter, both the eponymous Alcaic stanza as well as the other meters which he employs in his fragments. Attention to metrical rhythm shows how a sense of urgency haunts the very structure of his poetry. From here, I contextualize the frequency of Alcaeus's use of temporal adverbs within his corpus and the temporal words which most frequently appear – making use of the index which supplements Eva Marie Voigt's (1971) edition of Alcaeus and Sappho – to demonstrate the poetic strategies that

are involved in the poet's hastening of the present moment. I next explore particular fragments at greater length: namely, Fragments 6 and 326 (on the turmoil of the sea), 129 and 130b (on Pittacus and exile), 140 (an ecphrasis of a home full of armor), and 332 and 347 (two drinking songs). Together, these case studies demonstrate the range of themes and settings which Alcaeus explores in his lyric and show that a panicked atmosphere runs through all of them.

For example, the urgency of sailing – whether literal or referring to a figurative “ship of state”, an interpretive issue which Anna Uhlig (2018) discusses at length – presents a speaker very much not at peace, and indeed, in Fragment 326, the opening statement itself proclaims a state of confusion: ἀσυννέτημι τῶν ἀνέμων στάσις, “I do not understand the stasis of the winds”. Similarly, Fragment 140 exhibits an atmosphere of panic through the visual descriptions of the items in its ecphrasis. Even before the call to memory in the poem's final line snaps one's attention to the present moment (τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ'), verbs of sparkling (μαρμαίρει) and nodding (νεύουσιν) describe quick motions which stress action over relaxation. Throughout his poetry, Alcaeus rushes from one intense situation to another as meter, temporal adverbs, and verb choice create a recurrent state of urgency. What arises from his state of urgency and my focus on it here is a poetic vocabulary that is particular to Alcaeus alone.

For textual editions, I use Voigt's numbering of the fragments and refer primarily to her edition of Alcaeus, while at times observations in David Campbell's (1972) and Felix Budelmann's (2018) Greek lyric anthologies supplement my analysis.

#### Select Bibliography

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