

LESBIAN ARMOUR: ALCAEUS FR. 140 VOIGT

In Athenaeus we have the record of an appreciation of the martial poetry of Alcaeus and Archilochos. Alcman knew that in archaic Sparta the lyre counterbalanced the sword and spear¹, but, in the view of Athenaeus (as expressed by his speaker at a learned symposium), the spear outweighed the lyre in the balance of Alcaeus' esteem. The text Athenaeus reproduces preserves our longest fragment from Alcaeus (16 lines by one division; 8 by another)². If we do not have the poem's beginning, we have its end. Bits of the poem are also preserved in two papyri from Oxyrhynchus: *POxy.* 2295 fr. 1 (giving fragments of its beginning) and *POxy.* 2296 fr. 4 (giving bits of lines 5-10). We lack the two lines that open the poem. They must contain an address to Alcaeus' allies in what will be a factional battle. This is the text given in Athenaeus (14.627A) and improved by editors. The text I present here is that of David Campbell³:

μαρμαίρει δὲ μέγας δόμος
χάλκωι, πᾶσα δ' Ἄρηι κεκόσμηται στέγα
5 λάμπραισιν κυνίαισι, κατ
τᾶν λευκοὶ κατέπερθεν ἵππιοι λόφοι
νεύουσιν, κεφάλαισιν ἄν-
δρων ἀγάλματα· χάλκια δὲ πασσάλωις
κρύπτοισιν περικείμεναι·
10 λάμπραι κνάμιδες, ἔρκος ἰσχύρω βέλεος,
θόρρακές τε νέω λίνω
κόϊλαί τε κατ' ἄσπιδες βεβλήμεναι·
πάρ δὲ Χαλκίδικαι σπάθαι,
πάρ δὲ ζώματα πόλλα καὶ κυπάσσιδες.

¹ A line reported by Plutarch in his *Life of Lykourgos* 21.6: fr. 41 in Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford 1962) (*PMG*); fr. 143 in Calame, *Alcman* (Rome 1983) and in Davies, *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 1 (Oxford 1991) (*PMGF*).

² 14.627A-B (fr. 140 in Eva-Maria Voigt, *Sappho et Alcaeus* (Amsterdam 1971); fr. 357 in Edgar Lobel and Denys Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford 1955), and Gauthier Liberman, *Alcée: Fragments*, two vols. (Paris 1999). Page's long description of Lesbian armour in *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955) 209-233 inspired the title of this essay and the British spelling of armour. The archaeology of this poem is not to be found in bronze. Like Page, A. M. Snodgrass takes the description to be "outdated" – meaning Homeric, *Early Greek Armour* (Edinburgh 1964) 183.

³ *Greek Lyric: Sappho and Alcaeus* (Cambridge, MA & London 1994) fr. 140. In his earlier *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Selection of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry* (London 1967) Campbell presented a poem of eight long lines (two glyconics | iambic metron) (357).

15 τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ', ἐπεὶ
 δὴ πρότιστ' ὑπὰ τῶργον ἔσταμεν τόδε.

In line 4 the word *Ares*⁴ must mean that the house and *andron* (or men's banqueting hall) which was the setting for this stasiotic poem was agleam with the armor of warfare⁵. The reason this poem is cited in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai* is to support the reasonable claim (made in 14.627A-B) that both the archaic poets Archilochos and Alcaeus valued warfare more than they valued poetry: "In any case, the poet Alcaeus, a poet if there was ever a lyric poet, sets courage above the career of the poet. He was too committed to warfare, and, priding himself in his exploits as a warrior, he says...". The sixteen lines are now quoted, just as are two lines of Archilochos 1 produced in sequel (14.627C; West *IEG*² 1):

εἶμι δ' ἐγὼ θεράπων μὲν Εὐναλίιοιο ἄνακτος,
 καὶ Μουσέων ἐρατὸν δῶρον ἐπιστάμενος.

The analysis of Archilochos' concession to the Muses in Athenaeus is very likely correct. Archilochos himself was concerned with his armor and the spear-bearing barons of Chalkis and Alcaeus' Lesbian Armour includes swords from Chalkis on Euboea. In our first whole example of the scene of a banquet of the heroic dead (the so-called Totenmahl relief) we find a warrior heroized in death reclining on a dining couch and holding a *phiale* in his left hand. He is flanked by a mourning wife, seated to the left of the viewer. A serving boy and fragments of the dog so often found in these reliefs are positioned in front of the banquet table⁶. On the "wall" of his banquet room (or *andron*) are displayed a draped round shield, the traces of a helmet, a spear suspended from the wall, a breastplate, and shin guards (*knemides*). The spear with three leather thongs attached to it is telling, for it seems to recall the two-line elegiac poem we know as "fragment" 2 of Archilochos. It can be illustrated in the "Seven Against Thebes" vase from Mycene⁷:

⁴ The form Ἄρηι is clearly not Aeolic (but metrically equivalent to Aeolic Ἄρευι). It is difficult to think of another word in the dative that would be appropriate. The word was often set off by daggers in older editions.

⁵ Some scholars rather think of a sanctuary, a *heroon*: thus, recently, A.M. Cirio, *Nuovi dati sul culto degli eroi: una interpretazione di Alceo, 140 V*, in S. Ribichini & al. (eds.), *La questione delle influenze vicino-orientali sulla religione greca* (Rome 2001), 299-305, quoting previous literature.

⁶ The relief was discovered buried in the entrance courtyard of the church of Hekatontapyliane in Paroikia, Paros and published by N. M. Kontoleon, Ἀρχαϊκὴ Ζώφορος ἐκ Πάρου, Χαριστήριον εἰς Ἀναστάσιον Κ. Ὀρλάνδον (Athens 1965) I 348-418. It figures as relief 3 (p. 75) in Rhea N. Thönges-Stringaris, *Das griechische Totenmahl*, "AthMit" 80, 1965, 1-99.

⁷ Fr. 2 in M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati* (second edition, Oxford 1989) (*IEG*²). The vase from Mycene is often illustrated; see note 8 below.

ἐν δορὶ μὲν μοι μᾶζα μεμαγμένη, ἐν δορὶ δ' οἶνος
Ἴσμαρικός. πίνω δ' ἐν δορὶ κεκλιμένος.

If the relief reflects these two lines, it gives us in the absence of an inscription the identity of the *heros* honored by the relief⁸. Kontoleon read in the traces of the last cutting on this relief to the right as an inverted *chelys* lyre. One can only hope that he is right in this, but this identification requires the eyes of faith. I doubt it⁹.

There is something that is not static about this martial and political poem of Alcaeus cited by Athenaeus to prove the value the Lesbian poet placed on warfare. The armor displayed in the walls of the great house where Alcaeus gathered with his aristocratic fellows in a partisan struggle within the city of Lesbos, brilliant as it is, has attracted most attention. Denys Page has devoted pages to Lesbian armour in his essays on Alcaeus¹⁰. But, left as a document of the material culture of archaic Lesbos, this poem seems inert, as inert as the armor stored in the storeroom of Odysseus' palace on Ithaca before it is removed (in *Od.* 21-22). These Homeric arms are static before they are taken from the storeroom. Alcaeus' description of the arms in the *andron* is static; nothing seems to happen here. The weapons of this house are fixed on its walls, although it seems that some have been thrown down. Alcaeus' companions must be imagined as reclining upon their couches, drinking, observing the armor and listening to the poet sing.

Only the last two lines of the poem suggest action. They prepare Alcaeus' fellow conspirators for the warfare to come. Usually, such exhortations are to be found in the sympotic poetry sung to the *aulos* in archaic elegiac

⁸ As I argue in *Archilochos Heros: The Cult of Poets in the Greek States* (Center for Hellenic Studies, Hellenic Studies 6), (Cambridge, MA 2004) Chapter II 1 c ("Reading the Parian Relief").

⁹ Kontoleon (1965) 1.413-415, illustrated in the drawing (414, Figure 7). The vase in the National Museum, Athens is Figure 9 in *Archilochos Heros* (p. 50). I illustrate a relief from Thasos, ca. 350, Thasos Museum (Inv. No. 22) in *Archilochos Heros* (46). It too has armor fixed on the "wall" of the banquet room: from left to right are displayed a round shield, a cuirass, and what appears to be a small helmet behind the reclining *heros*. Two banquet scenes with armor hung from the walls of a banquet room are shown in Oswyn Murray, *Symptica: A symposium on the Symposium* (Oxford 1999) Plate Ib (showing bows and quivers hung from the wall of the banquet room and three reclining symposiasts), but no women and Plate 14 showing three reclining symposiasts with their shields hung from the wall of the banquet room, again with no women present.

¹⁰ *Sappho and Alcaeus* (as in n. 2) 209-223. Homeric armor contrasts remarkably with the armor described in Alcaeus, as is plain from the description of Homeric armor and the archaeological record of H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London 1950): "Arms and Armour" (182-335).

poetry¹¹. Alcaeus' poem is melic and concerns not his city (Mytilene it would seem), but his faction. The first lines of the poem (1-2) must have been an exhortation to the partisans addressed in the last two lines. The only movement in the poem is the movement of light on bronze. The great house is filled with light reflected from the helmets and shin-pieces suspended from its walls. There can be no doubt that this poem is one of Alcaeus' *στασιωτικά* or exhortations to companions engaged with him in civil strife to do battle. The weapons displayed are both protective and offensive: they are helmets, shin-guards, cuirasses of new linen, swords, belts, and *κυπάσσιδες*, apparently a short frock. The oddity of the description is the “new-made linen vests and hollow shields “thrown pell-mell upon the floor”¹². The problem of visualizing this scene is the sight of shields thrown to the floor of the banquet room. The scene would then resemble the chamber of the grave of Philip of Macedon excavated in Vergina (ancient Aigai) in Macedon. Armor has fallen from the wall of the tomb. On the floor lie a rusted bronze shield cover, greaves, and a helmet, and, next to the sarcophagus a sword. An iron spearhead is still fixed to the wall. Manolis Andronicos has identified this as the tomb of Philip of Macedon¹³. I have no explanation for the verb in Alcaeus 140 describing the shields (*κόϊλαί τε κατ ἄσπιδες βεβλήμεναι*), but I would note that that the last three pieces of equipment (the swords, the, belts, and tunics) must also be “thrown down pell-mell” on the floor (*πὰρ* is twice repeated in lines 13-14)¹⁴. This is not a

¹¹ Martin West has described the character of a group of elegiacs simply: “There is about to be a battle. The fighting men are being exhorted to be brave and win glory” (*Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, Oxford 1974, 10). Ewen Bowie lists the elegies that might belong to this grouping as: Tyrtæus 10, 11, and 14 but perhaps also 2, 19, 20, 23, and 13a; Callinus 1 and perhaps 5(a); Mimnermus 14; *Theognidea* 549-54; in Oswyn Murray ed., *Sympotica: A symposium of the Greek Symposium* (Oxford 1990) 222-223.

¹² In the translation of Anne Pippin Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets: Archilochos, Alcaeus, Sappho* (Cambridge, MA 1983) 124.

¹³ *Vergina: The Royal Tombs and the Ancient City*, Athens 1993. The arms are shown in Figure 31 (p. 70) and Figure 72 (p. 118).

¹⁴ Benedetto Marzullo, *Il “Miraggio” di Alceo* (Berlin and New York 2009) devotes a monograph of 172 pages to this short poem. His novel suggestion that the “hollow shields thrown down” were abandoned by the enemy in flight,” shields taken by Alcaeus and his fellow hoplites from Lesbos. But the examples Marzullo cites are the booty taken from temples or displayed on public monuments. The key phrase is *κόϊλαί τε κατ ἄσπιδες βεβλήμεναι*. That is, these are hollow shields that were thrown down as they were abandoned by the enemies of the warriors assembled in Alcaeus' great house on Lesbos (especially in Chapters V and VI). They would then be the plunder (*λάφυρα*) taken from *ῥιψάσπιδες*. Archilochos was another *ῥίψασπις* (*IEG*² 5 West), as was Alcaeus himself during the defeat of Lesbos by the Athenians at Sigeum (Lobel and Page, *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* 428 a and b). The Athenians hung his shield on the walls of the sanctuary to Athena in Sigeum.

pretty picture. There is no mention of a spear in this poem, nor of bows, arrows, or quivers. In the last lines (or line) of the poem Alcaeus exhorts his companions to put on their armor and grasp their swords¹⁵:

15 τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ', ἐπεὶ
δὴ πρότιστ' ὑπὰ τῶργον ἔσταμεν τόδε.

There is something Homeric and energetic in this ending. Alcaeus is reminding his companions of what the weapons of their *andron* are meant for. The verb λάθεσθ' reminds of the Homeric scenes of warfare in which either the Trojan or Achaeans “forget their fierce valor”¹⁶. In *Il.* 15.322 the Achaeans “forget” theirs as Apollo leads the Trojans against them with his terrifying aegis and war cry (λάθοντο δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς). And, of course, the warrior can recall (μνήσασθαι) his furious valor and become what is called in German Siegfried¹⁷. Alcaeus is exhorting his comrade to recall just who they are and what their swords and armor are for. This is exactly what we discover in L.-P. fr. 70.8-9.

This poem also reflects an earlier poem and derives the power of its persuasiveness from an allusion. The allusion is to an epic in which weapons long unused – but stored in an inner room of a palace – are finally put to use in a victorious battle within the palace. The scene Alcaeus invokes with the confidence that he will be understood comes from the last books of the *Odyssey*¹⁸. The beginning of the end for the suitors who have dominated Ithaca for twenty years during Odysseus' absence comes when, with the urging of Athena, Penelope climbs up to the second floor of the palace of Odysseus on Ithaca, unlocks the long closed door of its storage room (θάλαμος) and takes out the iron bow of Odysseus, with its quiver and death bearing arrows (*Od.* 21.1-60). In the *Odyssey* the opening of the locked

Still another poet, Horace, did the same in the battle of Philippi in 42 BC (*Odes* 2.7.9-16). The contrast between Horace's shield (*relicta non bene parmula*) and the nonchalant confidence of Archilochos is remarkable. M. G. Bonanno has also devoted a separate article to *Alcaeus fr. 140: Alceo fr. 140 V.*, “Philologus” 120, 1976, 1-11. Her analysis is more revealing than the 159 pages of Marzullo. Her *L'allusione necessaria: Ricerche intertestuali sulla poesia greca e latina* (Rome 1990) is the focus of this much more focused essay, but the term “intertextual” does not seem to fit a culture that was then oral and performed in the case of Alcaeus and Sappho. This poem has exerted a fascination among Italian scholars: cf. M. Del Freato, *Alc. fr. 140 Voigt: il problema delle armi*, “RAL” 1993, 377-392 and G. Colesanti, *La disposizione delle armi in Alc. 140 V.*, “RFIC” 123, 1995, 385-408.

¹⁵ Liberman reasonably asks: “*carminis finis?*” (in his note to line 15 on page 68).

¹⁶ As rightly noted by Bonanno (see n. 14).

¹⁷ For the “forgetfulness” of valor, see too *Il.* 11.313; for bringing it to mind *Il.* 6.112 and 11.286. For the mindfulness of valor or lack of it, cf. *Il.* 11.710.

¹⁸ Wolfgang Rösler has a brief treatment of this poem in his *Dichter und Gruppe: Eine Untersuchung zu den Bedingungen und zur historischen Funktion früher griechischer Lyrik am Beispiel Alkaios* (Munich 1980) 148-158, but he only glances at the *Iliad*, not the *Odyssey*.

storage room is the beginning of the struggles and death for the suitors (ἀέθλια καὶ φόνου ἀρχήν, *Od.* 21.4). All the armor of the palace on Ithaca is stored in a θάλαμος¹⁹. This storeroom is opened by Telemachos as he removes four shields, eight spears, and four helmets (*Od.* 22.99-115). The connection forged between these two stages of the destruction of the suitors is the formulaic line: βῆ δ' ἴμεναι θάλαμόν δε (*Od.* 21.8 and 22.109)²⁰. What Penelope finds in the deepest recess of the storeroom are the great iron bow of Odysseus, its quiver, and death bearing arrows. What Telemachos finds when he enters the room are weapons for himself, his father, Eumaios, and Philoitios. It is clear that there are more weapons in this storeroom. As Melanthis attempts to retrieve some of these weapons to distribute to the suitors he is trapped at the entrance of the storeroom by Eumaios and Philoitios. They discover him carrying a splendid helmet and an ancient shield infected with mildew – the bronze shield Laertes once carried as a young man (*Od.* 22.135-186). They have been laid away for a generation. The armor of Alcaeus' *andron* is ready for use.

In this poem Alcaeus reminds his friends not to forget what all these weapons are meant for: τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ' (15). In another political poem, Alcaeus reminds his allies of the families they have come from and, implicitly, what is now expected of them (fr. 6 L.-P. – the ship of state poem).

If we lack the first two lines of Alcaeus poem of exhortation to his companions who can see the reflection of the armor displayed and stored in the great house in which they are meeting, we can imagine how the poem began: Alcaeus reminds them of who they are. Callinus 1 suggests a perfect analogue:

μέχρις τεῦ κατάκεισθε; κότ' ἄλκιμον ἔξετε θυμόν,
ὦ νέοι;

κατάκεισθε can be translated “lay about”, but it can also mean “stretch out on your banqueting couches”. The appeal to the shaming specter of ancestry is apparent in Tyrtaeus 8:

¹⁹ The contrast between a men's chamber (ἀνδρών//ἀνδρέων) and a storage room (θάλαμος) is well illustrated by Herodotus' description of the fear of King Kroisos of Lydia for the safety of his son, Atys. To protect his son from a falling weapon Kroisos had all the weapons hanging from the walls of the *andron* of his palace removed to its *thalamoi*, (ἀκόντια δὲ καὶ δοράτια καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα τοῖσι χρέωνται ἐς πόλεμον ἄνθρωποι, ἐκ τῶν ἀνδρεῶνων ἐκκομίσας ἐς τοὺς θαλάμους συνένησε), Herodotus 1.34.3. Liberman surveys the variety of interpretations of the place where Alcaeus and his fellow warriors gather with their armor (in his note to his fragment 142 (217-218) and glances at *Od.* 16.284-286. The palace of Odysseus on Ithaca deserves the attention I give it in this essay.

²⁰ The scene is recalled as Amphimedon describes his death to Agamemnon in the Hades of *Od.* 24.164-185.

ἀλλ', – Ἡρακλῆος γὰρ ἀνικῆτου γένος ἔστέ –
θαρσεῖτ'.

The final two lines of the poem constitute an appeal not to forget the weapons that are set out in plain view of Alcaeus' comrades. Do not lose sight of these (τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ') has, as we have seen, a Homeric resonance, for the warriors in the *Iliad* are constantly being reminded to recall their valor and Alcaeus' audience is being asked to recall these books of the *Odyssey*.

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ABSTRACT.

This essay is meant to remove Alcaeus fr. 140 Voigt from the scrutiny of archaeological philologists and archaeologists to literary criticism, although I am concerned with the archaeological record. Its purpose is to show both its structure (as this can be reconstructed in part of the first two lines) and the description of the arms stored in the storehouse of Odysseus' Palace on Ithaca in *Od.* 21 and 22.

KEYWORDS.

Alcaeus, Archaic *stasiotic* poetry, Armour: Homeric and Lesbian, the Arms of Odysseus.