

Elegy

couplets. ἡ ἐλεγεία mostly corresponds to our ‘elegy’, in the double meaning of a poem and a genre, while the plural ἐλεγείαι means a work consisting of elegiac couplets. None of these terms is used self-referentially in the archaic and classical elegies themselves, except in Critias 4.3 W, where ἐλεγείον has primarily a metrical meaning. It seems impossible to determine the precise relationship between the three terms. Are ἐλεγείον and ἐλεγεία derived from an adjective ἐλεγείος? And does this adjective come from ἔλεγος? Opinions vary.

Ewen Bowie understands ἔλεγος as ‘the sort of song usually accompanied by the *aulos*, that was sung chiefly at symposia’.³ This interpretation seems to prevail, but it is hard to deny that it is problematic in some instances. First, there is the use of elegiac couplets in Euripides’ *Andromache* (ll. 103–16), when the protagonist laments her own fate, as a continuation of the mourning that culminates in Hector’s death and Troy’s ruin. Moreover Euripides frequently employs the term ἔλεγος, without exception referring to a sad and mournful song.⁴ Since we can hardly consider complaint as a dominant characteristic of elegy at the time of Euripides (see below, pp. 175–8), this characterisation of ἔλεγος must be explained in other ways: it may be wrong to postulate a regional tradition⁵ or to assume that elegy had its origin in lament, but there must have been some forms of elegy in which complaint and mourning prevailed.

Elegy as a medium of communication

Archaic and classical elegy was ‘published’ in two media: oral performance and inscription on monuments or other objects.

Elegiac texts written or engraved on monuments or objects are classified as epigrams. The term ‘epigram’ originally referred to any metrical text inscribed on a material object.⁶

Archaic and classical epigrams are usually classified as ‘funerary’ (inscribed on tombs or monuments commemorating the dead) and ‘dedicatory’ (inscribed on monuments or objects offered to the gods). Such texts are predominantly public. We also have many examples of private inscriptions from earlier times, mainly indicating the owner of the inscribed object.

The elegiac couplet is not the original metre of epigram: the earliest examples of metrical writing (and some of the earliest examples of any

³ Bowie 1986a, 27. ⁴ *Hel.* 185; *IT* 146, 1091; *Tro.* 119.

⁵ For the notion of a funerary kind of elegy originating in the Peloponnese see Page 1936, and for possible links between lament and elegy in the Ionian tradition see Gebhard 1926.

⁶ On the meaning of ἐπίγραμμα in the fifth century: Gentili 1968, 39.

writing to survive) are in hexameters, sometimes combined with pentameters, but also with iambic or generally ‘lyric’ metres.⁷ Only during the sixth century does the elegiac couplet come to prevail as the metre most widely used in epigram. The reasons for this dominance are a matter of speculation. Partly considerations of form play a role: the couplet is a short strophe, able neatly to contain a unit of meaning; furthermore, composition is made easier by the widespread diffusion of epic, and also specifically elegiac, diction.⁸ Even non-professional poets – and composers of epigrams were often non-professionals – can use an impressive repertory of themes, sentences and phrases that are greatly adaptable within the small confines of the elegiac strophe. Finally, at the level of communication, the elegiac medium may express, as we shall see, authoritative points of view, with a strong pragmatic impact on listeners, or readers in the case of epigram. (Further on epigram see below, pp. 179–82.)

Elegy is performed in two different contexts: private or sympotic (below, pp. 171–8), and public (pp. 178–9). At the *symposion*, elegy is usually sung, accompanied by an *aulos*.⁹ Public elegy is more problematic. Bowie, in an influential essay, assigned elegiac performance almost exclusively to the *symposion*; the only exceptions were the very long narrative elegies which had a different setting: ‘these narratives were intended for performances in competition at public festivals’.¹⁰ When Bowie wrote this, long narrative elegiac poems were no more than a shadow: only titles reported in very late sources and some fragments attributed hypothetically to these elegies.

The 1992 publication of the fragments of Simonides’ Plataea elegy broadly confirmed Bowie’s hypotheses, and has altogether changed our understanding of elegy. Simonides’ elegy is not simply narrative, but it is also celebratory, exhortatory and funerary because at the core of the preserved texts is the commemoration of those who fell at Plataea. It is conceivable that the *aulos* also accompanied public elegiac performances. However, the remarkable ability of elegy to adapt itself to different performance contexts and to different kinds of subject matter should make us hesitate before excluding *a priori* all modes of performance other than song accompanied by the *aulos*.¹¹

⁷ Hansen 1983, xi. ⁸ Gentili 1968, 65.

⁹ Dicaearchus 88 and 89 Wehrli and Aristoxenus 125 Wehrli (with Reitzenstein’s remarks 1893, 3–44), Chamaeleon 28 Wehrli; for the elegiac ἀείδειν see also Thgn. 825 and 943.

¹⁰ Bowie 1986a, 14–21, 34 (quoted).

¹¹ The possibility of elegy sung to the accompaniment of the lyre is affirmed by Gerber 1997b, 96–8, and see Thgn. 533–4. ἔλεγος in Euripides cited above n. 4.

Symptotic elegy

The history of symptotic elegy may be arranged as a sequence of four types distinguished by their respective temporal, spatial and socio-political structures. First of all the Ionian *symposion*, continued by the early Attic *symposion*; this is perhaps the original context of the more common varieties of elegy, and offers a linguistic and metrical pattern for symptotic forms in other geographical and dialectal areas. Then the Spartan *symposion* or *parasymposion* (pp. 173–4) and the Megarian *symposion* (pp. 174–5). Finally, the elegies of the best known poets of all this tradition are found in the Attic *symposion* of the fifth century (pp. 175–8).

Ionian elegy

The earliest Ionian poet known to us is Callinus, living in Ephesus in the first half of the seventh century. His remains are collected in four sets of fragments, twenty-five lines in total. The longest of them with twenty-one lines (1 W) is a lively exhortation to young citizens (νέοι, l. 2) while πόλεμος γαῖαν ἅπασαν ἔχει (l. 4 ‘all the land is in the grip of war’), probably the Cimmerian invasion which is mentioned also in 3 W. The use of the verb κατάκεισθαι (‘lie’) at line 1 is clear evidence of the symptotic context of this elegy.¹² Callinus’ *symposion* is similar to the assembly of military commanders described in the *Iliad*. His is an exhortatory kind of poetry, apparently avoiding personal themes. There are many analogies with the topics of epic poetry, although scholars have also pointed to ideological differences.¹³ At the time of Strabo (first century) the corpus of Callinus’ works was still extensively preserved: it was used as an authoritative historical source and was more varied than it is now, and included much historical and genealogical material.¹⁴ The few fragments surviving today are predominantly martial.

Mimnermus’ *symposion* is less directed towards action and more interested in generalisation and reflection. Themes of public life, politics and war seem filtered through a pensive – sometimes even sorrowful – attitude. Mimnermus flourished at Colophon in the second half of the seventh century.¹⁵ His work was collected in two books:¹⁶ a collection of poems called *Nanno*, perhaps from the name of the αὐλητρίς (‘woman who plays the *aulos*’, but also ‘courtesan’) beloved by the poet,¹⁷ and a historical poem

¹² Tedeschi 1978. ¹³ See below, pp. 185–6.

¹⁴ E.g. test. 6 G-P = Strab. 13.1.48. ¹⁵ Jacoby 1918, 268–82 and West 1974, 63 and 72–4.

¹⁶ Porphy. *ad Hor. Epist.* 2.2.101 = test. 9 G-P.

¹⁷ Hermesianax 7.37 Powell = test. 2 G-P; Posidippus *epigr.* 9.1 = test. 3 G-P. The same title accompanies Mimnermus’ fragments 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 24 W.

entitled *Smyrneis*.¹⁸ Approximately eighty lines are preserved, most of them attributed to the *Nanno* by the ancient sources. Love and youth would seem the most frequent subjects. Elsewhere we find an invitation to capture ‘Aphrodite’s gifts’, while ‘youth’s flowers’ last (1 W), the famous comparison between the seasons of nature and the seasons of life (2 W) and a further contrast between youth’s frailty and impending painful old age, using the myth of Tithonus to speak of the ‘endless evil’ represented through the immortality of an aging body (4 W). But several fragments with narrative content suggest a less one-sided view of Mimnermus’ output. In fact, of twenty-one fragments published by West, only the first seven (comprising, however, more than half of the preserved verses) reflect the image of Mimnermus as a poet of love, pleasure and youth. The others seem to belong to historical and mythological tales; the original extent of these tales can only be guessed. In this selective transmission, Mimnermus’ reputation as a love poet in the Latin tradition must have been a crucial stage in shaping the elegiac genre.

Despite certain variations (different emphases on political and philosophical reflection), the early Ionian *symposion* sets a pattern for most of the preserved sympotic elegies. First of all, Xenophanes’ poetry (sixth century, from Colophon, but active in Magna Graecia) represents a sort of philosophical ‘revolt’ against the epic tradition: this is how one should best understand the *recusatio* of myths ‘where nothing is useful’ (1.21 W), like those of the Giants and Titans, and the criticism of anthropomorphised gods. Today we have left sixty-eight lines in ten fragments as well as the titles of two historical and narrative poems (*The Foundation of Colophon* and *The Colonisation of Elea*). The themes of Xenophanes’ elegy are varied: the rules of the *symposion* (1 and 5 W),¹⁹ criticism of the honours granted to athletes (2 W), a polemic against Lydian ἀβροσύνη (‘luxury’), a narrative of the Colophonians’ moral corruption (3 W, perhaps from *The Foundation of Colophon*), invective against greed (6 W), parody of the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis (7 and 7a W).

The elegiac compositions of Solon (about 630–560 BCE, archon in Athens probably in 594/3) are predominantly political in character.²⁰ There are 230 surviving lines in thirty fragments, along with fifty iambic lines. An elegy entitled *Salamis* (1–3 W) was probably composed for a public occasion;²¹

¹⁸ *P.Univ.Mediol.* 17 col. II 26 = fr. 21 G-P.

¹⁹ Vetta 1996, 207 and 1999, 238 with bibliography and Ford 2002, ch. 2.

²⁰ For the chronology see Cadoux 1948, 93–9, 104–6 and Davies 1971, 323f.

²¹ West 1974, 12; Henderson 1982, 24f.; Tedeschi 1982, 41–4; for a different opinion see Bowie 1986a, 16f. and Bartol 1993, 54f.

otherwise, Solon's poetic production seems to address a restricted audience, his *hetaireia*, a group of citizens in agreement with Solon's politics of moderation and conciliation between social groups fighting at Athens.²² At the end of the fifth century, Solon is connected by oligarchs with the propagandistic motif of *patrios politeia*,²³ the return to the (alleged) 'constitution of the fathers'; the retrieval of Solon the poet, several traces of which remain in Theognis' *syllogê*, begins in this context.

Tyrtaeus and elegy at Sparta

The sympotic tradition at Sparta is ancient and widespread, and certainly cannot be limited to the paramilitary *syssition* (the 'common meal' of the Spartiates, the ruling elite of Sparta), about which ancient sources speak most frequently. Already in one fragment of Alcman a sympotic atmosphere is created by the mention of *klinai* ('couches'), suggesting a kind of *symposion* where guests reclined (19 PMGF). However, at an earlier stage, the Spartan *symposion* seems to have been an occasion also for melic and kitharodic performances, represented by the names of Terpander and Alkmanes.²⁴ Elegy appears late, and probably Tyrtaeus is not just the most famous (and only surviving) Spartan elegiac poet but also the first, and as far as we know the last. The appearance of elegy at Sparta can be explained with reference to particular socio-political needs: it is the medium of an ideology based on the hoplite organisation of the army and already shaped in the Ionian world, but new at Sparta at the time of the second Messenian War, after a (half-legendary) defeat of the Spartan army by the Argive hoplites at Hysiae. Tyrtaeus, in the Spartiates' *symposia*, sings and gives a heroic dimension to a new way of fighting, and turns it into an ethical principle valid for all.

We have much information about Tyrtaeus, but most of it – like for instance the legend of his Attic origin (test. 8 G-P) – is historically doubtful. His *floruit* is at the time of the second Messenian War (first half of the seventh century):²⁵ this period of severe crisis and social division is the wider context of the political-military exhortation in Tyrtaeus' poetry, devoted to promoting 'good government' (εὐνομία) as the only means of escape from the threat posed by the enemy (1 W).²⁶ Tyrtaeus' work, of which twenty-three fragments

²² Vetta 1983, xvii f.; on Solon's political elegy see Irwin 2005, and on various aspects of Solon and his contexts see the articles in Blok and Lardinois 2006.

²³ Morrow 1960, 81f., Mossé 1996, 1333. ²⁴ Calame 1983, xii f.

²⁵ *Suda* τ 610.7 Adler; Pausanias' chronology of the second Messenian war (684–668) would postpone Tyrtaeus' *floruit* by at least a generation: see Kiechle 1959.

²⁶ On Tyrtaeus' martial elegy see Shey 1976, Cartledge 1977 and Luginbill 2002.

comprising altogether about 150 verses remain, was collected in five books including ὑποθήκας δι' ἐλεγείας, 'exhortations through elegies', and μέλη πολεμιστήρια, 'battle songs',²⁷ or μέλη ἐμβατήρια, 'marching songs'.²⁸ With the exception of some remarkable Doric forms,²⁹ Tyrtaeus' fragments are composed in a panhellenic, universal and authoritative language, broadly similar to epic.³⁰

The Megarian symposion (Theognidea)

The nature of the Megarian *symposion*, in many ways similar to its Spartan counterpart, can be inferred from the collection (or *syllogê*) of poems preserved under the name of Theognis, not only from its genuinely 'Theognidean' parts, but also and above all from the inclusion in the collection of elegies from elsewhere which were felt suitable for revival and reuse alongside Theognis' own. In Megara symposiasts were seated rather than reclining as elsewhere, and drawn from several age classes.³¹ Poetic performance seems confined to a form of elegy that did not indulge in narrative, but aimed to establish rules of behaviour and to reaffirm group values. This kind of elegy reflects the sobriety (due also perhaps to economic reasons) and the conservatism of the *hetaireia*. It is an essentially dialogical kind of elegy, in which authority is imposed vertically on lower age classes but in which the voices of 'equals' often follow on from each other in a sort of continuous performance of separate short pieces. Such dialogical structure is probably at the origin of the *syllogê* or at least an important element in its creation. In this kind of context, the conservatism of the sympotic group is the reason for the repetitiveness of the songs, but at the same time the aristocratic egalitarianism opens up the way to extemporisation. Extemporisation takes shape as new songs are composed, but also as elegies or parts of elegies are performed which are different in origin but express contents and ideologies consonant with those of the group.

Theognis is the only elegiac poet under whose name a substantial collection of texts reached us through a medieval manuscript tradition: Theognis' *syllogê* consists of a large section (1,230 lines) with pieces of an ethical and political nature and a second book (158 lines) with erotic pieces.³² Welcker's

²⁷ *Suda* τ 610.5 Adler = test. 19 G-P. ²⁸ Ath. 14.63of.

²⁹ The comparative μάλιον (12.6 W) and the future ἀλοησεῦμεν (19.20 W). See also D'Alessio, this vol., 122.

³⁰ Arguing for an original composition in Doric, regularised into Ionic at an early stage of transmission, see Gentili 1969 and 1988, 56–60, 230.

³¹ Dentzer 1982, 429ff. (seated); Vetta 1992, 194 (age).

³² On this tradition see Young 1953.

Elegy

studies³³ showed the composite and heterogeneous character of the *syllogê*, which brings together Theognis' own poems, several texts already known under different authors' names³⁴ and others that are not known from elsewhere but are hardly attributable to Theognis. The original Theognidean nucleus can be pinned down only to a degree. The *syllogê* was probably formed as a kind of manual for symposiasts. The history of its formation can only be conjectured; in any case the stratification of the *syllogê* is a reflection of the progressive reuse of a collection based on an authoritative Megarian tradition, at symposia both in Megara itself and in Athens, especially in an oligarchic milieu.

A poet named Theognis flourished about 600 BCE: the lines attributed to him contain several references to specific events, but in some instances they seem to point to the second half of the seventh century, in others to the sixth.³⁵ Yet the distinctive features of Theognidean poetry are ideological, not historical, and the reconstruction of specific occasions often leads to a misunderstanding of the nature of the *syllogê*. 'The Theognidean Megara' is 'a paradigmatic homeland for all archaic Greeks';³⁶ the city is the subject of ideological poetry, not a real city: the poet, or the poets, of the *syllogê* are the spokesmen of an oligarchic group which, by way of poetic performance, defends its opinions, its values in a period of political disturbances and social upheavals, as well as its standing. The relationship between Theognis and Megara (like that between Theognis and Kyrnos) has no historical basis, but is presented 'as a traditional device for the organisation of wisdom'.³⁷

Many of the pieces in the *syllogê* are addressed to Kyrnos, the *erômenos* of the *persona loquens*. Their concerns are essentially ethico-political. The recurrent call for moderation in drinking (211f., 413f., 497f., 509f., 841–4, 873–6) is not representative of Greek convivial culture in general, as is often suggested, but expresses a specifically Megarian viewpoint, similar to the Spartan ideal of moderation. In fact the *syllogê* itself reflects elsewhere a different and surely widespread convivial practice, which permits drinking to excess, and indeed ritualises it in the *kômos* which typically followed on from many *symposia* (e.g. 1063–8).

Attic elegy

The presence and diffusion of Theognidean poetry in fifth-century Athenian culture is an unquestionable fact, important both for the transmission of the

³³ Welcker 1826.

³⁴ E.g. Tyrtaeus: 12.13–16 W = 1003–6; Mimnermus: 5.1–6 W = 1017–22; Solon: 6.3–4 W = 153–4.

³⁵ Dating Theognis: Okin 1985, Lane Fox 2000, 37–40.

³⁶ Introduction to Figueira and Nagy 1985, 3; see also Nagy 1985. ³⁷ Edmunds 1997, 44.

text and for the self-definition of politically oriented sympotic groups.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the opinion of many scholars the same period saw an irreversible decline of traditional sympotic poetry, and especially of elegy. On this view, the scanty fragments of fifth-century elegy marked a break with the modes and patterns typical of the archaic period. Poets like Dionysius Chalcus, Euenus of Paros, Ion of Chios and Critias were characterised by a new kind of sophistication foreshadowing Hellenistic poetry.³⁹ It was a phase of ‘decline’, marked by conventional, often sympotic, themes, and by the search for a ‘new’ style, affected in comparison with the vitality and engagement of archaic elegy. In this way fifth-century elegy has been denied the pragmatic function typical of traditional poetic communication.

This misunderstanding was probably caused by the selection process through which these texts have come down to us, many of them preserved in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistai* (= *Sophists at Dinner*, third century CE). The prevalence of convivial precepts is perhaps only the result of such one-sided selection. In fact, in Athens sympotic elegy seems to be used to oppose and subvert the democratic institutions of the city. Ion of Chios was probably born about 480⁴⁰ and died certainly before 421.⁴¹ Ion was an author versed in many literary genres, but he was famed above all as a tragedian.⁴² He also wrote dithyrambs, epigrams, paeans, hymns and prose works known under the title *Epidêmiai*, travel memoirs, in which he himself is the protagonist of many anecdotes of meetings with some of the best known men at the time. Only seven fragments remain of his elegiac output, thirty-seven verses in all. Particularly noteworthy are an elaborate poem dedicated to Dionysus (26 W) and a unique σπονδή (‘drink-offering’) to the guardian heroes of the Laconian genealogical tradition and of the Spartan royal families (27 W).⁴³ This is consistent with Ion’s close links with Athenian oligarchic circles, supporters of a policy of conciliation with Sparta. Finally, Ion is credited with a χίου κτίσις (*Foundation of Chios*). This was once considered a prose work, but was almost certainly composed in verse, ‘in the tradition of elegiac *ktiseis* and more generally of archaic elegy’.⁴⁴

There were two poets named Euenus, both natives of Paros (test. 5 and 6 G-P). The younger, a contemporary of Socrates, was better known and had probably many contacts in oligarchic sympotic circles. Plato mentions him on several occasions; when Socrates puts Aesop’s fables into verse during his imprisonment, it is not an accident that Euenus is the poet he inquires about

³⁸ Lane Fox 2000, 46–51; Vetta 2000.

³⁹ Garzya 1963, 91ff.; Miralles 1971; Prato 1987, 650 and 660–3.

⁴⁰ Ion *FGH* 392 F 13 and T 5a with the comments of Piccirilli 1990, 232f. ⁴¹ Test. 2 and 3 G-P.

⁴² Test. 1 and 6 G-P. For a collection of articles on Ion see Jennings and Katsaros 2007.

⁴³ West 1985b. ⁴⁴ Cerri 1977; see Ion fr. 7 G-P.

Elegy

(*Phaedo* 90d–91c = test. 11–12 G-P). As a sophist he taught the two children of Callias ‘human’ and ‘political’ virtues (*Apol.* 20b = test. 10 G-P) and as an orator he is quoted (*Phaedr.* 267a = test. 13 G-P) as the first to theorise the *παρέπαινος* (para-praise) and to compose *παράψογος* (para-blame). About twenty verses of his elegies survive in eight fragments.

Dionysius Chalcus is dated by two ancient testimonies: he led the foundation of Thurii in Magna Graecia (444 BCE) and his son was brought up at the home of the Athenian aristocrat Nikias (470–413).⁴⁵ Like Euenus, he was an orator as well as a poet; he may have received his nickname Χαλκός (‘the Bronze’) in consequence of a speech (test. 5 G-P) urging the Athenians to adopt bronze instead of silver coins. We have seven elegiac fragments, about twenty-five verses in all, mostly convivial in subject matter. Dionysius seems to have enjoyed affected and expressly obscure language⁴⁶ and bold metrical experiments, like the unparalleled use of a pentameter as the first line of an elegy (1 W).

Critias, who lived from about 460 till 403, took an active part in the political life of his time and was versed in several literary genres: tragedy, political oratory, treatises on *politeiai* (‘constitutions’).⁴⁷ In the sympotic fragments, the political references reveal continuity with the pragmatics of archaic elegy. Some verses of an elegy to Alcibiades (4 W) are mentioned by Hephaestion because of the anomaly of line 2, an iambic trimeter instead of the expected pentameter, explained by Critias by the impossibility of fitting Alcibiades’ name into dactyls; this does not seem an accident nor can it be just ascribed to the innovative tendencies of fifth-century elegy. Rather than a literary game, the intrusion of iambs could be a definite message to Alcibiades. In fact the presence of iambs in elegiac diction is a formal element of mocking parody. Also Critias’ unusual use of iambs could be a sign of mockery directed at a political antagonist.⁴⁸ A comparable political thrust, anti-democratic and subversive, is to be found in a number of fragments (2, 5, 7, 9 W). Another example of his political commitment is the long sympotic elegy (6 W) comparing Ionian sympotic behaviour to the moderation typical of Spartan *syssitia*; this elegy reflects programmatic support for Spartan ways of life through codification of a convivial ethos according to which moderation, even political virtue, excludes every kind of excess, as an alternative to the normal sympotic culture, which accepts drunkenness in the ritual celebration of Dionysus.

⁴⁵ Test. 3 and 5 G-P. ⁴⁶ Prato 1987, 662.

⁴⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of Critias’ life and works, see Iannucci 2002, 3–27; for ideological context see also Wilson 2003.

⁴⁸ Iannucci 2003.

It would seem therefore that in the context of oligarchic *symposia* at the end of the fifth century the poetry – certainly Critias’ poetry – was essentially practical, strictly tied to political action.

Public elegy

Our knowledge of public elegiac performances depends almost completely on the interpretation of the Simonides fragments published in 1992.⁴⁹ The papyri in question are probably copies of a book containing all of Simonides’ elegies, or at least of a Simonidean anthology containing elegies on both military and erotic topics.⁵⁰ Fragments eleg. 1–9 W² have been attributed, completely or in part,⁵¹ to the narrative of a naval battle, perhaps Artemision or Salamis, and fragments eleg. 10–18 W² have been recognised to be part of an elegy about the battle of Plataea. Fragments eleg. 19–22 W² are part of the sympotic elegies: 19 and 20 are of a gnomic kind and take up the Homeric theme of leaves as a symbol of life’s frailty;⁵² 21 is evidently erotic, while 22 could be an erotic elegy or a funerary lament.⁵³ 11 W² (parts of which are quoted in translation in the introduction, p. 5) is particularly important for many reasons: it includes a proem modelled on Homeric *prooemia*. The valour of heroes who died at Troy (especially Achilles and Patroclus) serves as an example for the valour of those who fell at Plataea. Moreover the poetic ‘I’ affirms the greatness of the epic model, but at the same time keeps some distance from it in the name of a different kind of poetics, based less on divine revelation (Homer’s Muse) than on participation in the events of the present.⁵⁴ The narrative of the events culminating in the decisive battle begins straight after the proem (11.23ff. W²): first there is the mention, elaborate and evocative, of the Spartans and their general Pausanias. All this together has led scholars to agree that the elegy was premiered at a public and official occasion. However, there is no agreement about the origin of the poem (was it commissioned for a special event, a festival or an *agôn*?); about who commissioned it (the Spartans and/or Pausanias, or the Athenians and/or Themistocles?); or about the place and circumstances of the performance (Plataea because of the commemoration of the war dead, Delphi,

⁴⁹ *P.Oxy.* 3695, partly overlapping with *P.Oxy.* 2327. Discussion of the New Simonides in Boedeker and Sider 2001.

⁵⁰ All elegies: Parsons 1992, 5; introduction to Boedeker and Sider 2001, 3. Anthology: Rutherford 2001b, 34.

⁵¹ Rutherford 2001b, 35–8; see also Kowerski 2005. ⁵² Sider 2001.

⁵³ See Rutherford 2001b, 51–3, and the opposed views of Mace 2001 (erotic utopia), Yatromanolakis 1998 (lament).

⁵⁴ Aloni 2001a, 95 and Capra 2001.

Elegy

Olympia – both panhellenic places in accordance with a panhellenic spirit perceived in the elegy – or again Sparta, in Achilles' temple, or the Isthmus?). Beyond its (remarkable) aesthetic value, the Plataea elegy opens up new perspectives in considering elegy as a poetic genre. Even if it narrates events, the elegy is not a narrative poem comparable with attested foundation stories such as Mimnermus' *Smyrneis* or the *Archaeology of the Samians* by Semonides of Amorgos. It suggests a performance firmly tied to a topical event, where the commemoration of victory is blended with elaboration of mourning for the warriors who fell in the battle.

These peculiarities – further evidence for the flexibility of the genre – reopen the question of the existence of threnodic elegy, potentially both at sympotic events (Archil. 13 W) and in public contexts. A threnodic function (not necessarily origin) of elegy helps explain some facts that are otherwise hard to account for: the connotation of ἔλεγος as a mournful song as early as the fifth century, a progressively exclusive use of the couplet as the metre of funerary epigram, the use of the elegiac couplet by Euripides in Andromache's *thrênos* (above, p. 169).

Broadly narrative content characterises also the elegiac fragments of *P.Oxy.* LXIX 4708, published by Dirk Obbink in 2005. The papyrus consists of eight fragments, only the first of which – twenty-eight lines – presents some reasonably legible text. Obbink's attribution to Archilochus is not based on coincidence with an already known text, but seems all the same sound. Although the papyrus has many gaps, its content is clear. It tells a mythical story: the Achaeans' erroneous landing in Mysia and their hasty departure after bloody clashes with the Mysians led by the Arcadian Telephus. The narrative structure is complicated: a brief narrative of the Achaean defeat and retreat onto their ships in the first fifteen verses is followed by a sort of narrative regression focused on Telephus, whose deadly fight against Achilles is probably also covered. It is uncertain what role this story had in the elegy as a whole.⁵⁵

Elegy and epigram

A dual connection with real life characterises early epigram: circumstance and the inscribed object. The monument celebrating the dead, the statue that is dedicated or the object that is personalised really exists and can repeatedly be looked at or read. Written text in fact changes in a permanent way the inscribed object. This fact gives an inscription the power to communicate on various levels: the lettering, the type of the material object, the context of this object (often mentioned in the text of the epigram) are all part of the overall meaning of an inscription, just as music and dance were an integral

⁵⁵ For a preliminary statement see Obbink 2005. More in Aloni and Iannucci 2007.

part of the sense of a *partheneion* by Alcman. Yet the forces of nature and history have done away with some of these semiotic elements; in some cases, as with the *partheneion*, all we have left is the plain text transmitted by the literary tradition. The history of epigram is characterised by a progressive dissolution of its ties with its physical and communicative contexts. From the fifth century on, epigram started freeing itself first from its material support – to become a literary and then bookish genre – and then also from the obligation to treat real events and people; this is particularly clear in the case of funerary epigrams which soon started commemorating people who were long dead and people who never lived.

The communicative structure of elegiac epigrams, as that of performed poems, should be considered from the point of view of addressees and commission. Both funerary and dedicatory epigrams were for public consumption, but their reception is not necessarily collective: the reader of an inscription may be alone. A few epigrams were written for a private context; most of these are inscribed on everyday objects, with a vaguely gnomic content, sometimes clearly playful or with political overtones (e.g. 439 and 454 *CEG*).

Private commission seems to prevail for both funerary and dedicatory epigram. Private commission would seem to reflect the inherently private origin of inscriptions which were associated with particular individuals or families. Public commission is a fifth-century phenomenon, probably linked to collective inscriptions celebrating those who fell in the Persian Wars.⁵⁶

Early epigrams are scanty in content, limited to the name of the dead person(s), the dedicator, the god the dedication is made to, and sometimes the maker of the inscribed object. Dedicatory epigrams often contain a reference to the dedicated object (for example ‘this statue’ or ‘this grave’) and to the origin of the dedication (expressed for example with the noun *δεκάτη*, ‘tithe’). Concise expressions of mourning and sometimes of the circumstances of the death appear quite early in funerary inscriptions. Death in battle or death while young is one of the most frequently recurring themes, and often comes with brief references to the unending mourning of those left behind, above all the parents. Progressively we find references to activities, to the social role and the civic virtues of the dead person, as well as to his or her beauty, wisdom or prudence.

Funerary inscriptions are expressed in the first or third person, with standard phrasing: ‘I am the grave ...’ and ‘This is the grave ...’. Sometimes dedications speak in the first person too (e.g. 232 *CEG*: ‘[someone] dedicated

⁵⁶ According to Hansen 1983, the only pre-fifth century publicly commissioned inscriptions are 143, 179 and 401 *CEG*.

me ...' and 251 *CEG*: 'I belong to Pallas Athena. Eudikos' son dedicated me, | Dexitheos, as a first-fruit of his possessions'; both from Athens, late sixth century). However the use of the third person, with a deictic related to the dedicated object, is more usual (e.g. 202 *CEG*: 'Aeschines dedicated *this* gift to Athena | having vowed a tithe to the child of Great Zeus').⁵⁷

The diction of epigram on the one hand contains a number of characteristic formulae, which are less common elsewhere, and which stayed mostly unchanged across periods.⁵⁸ Most frequent among them are σῆμα (σᾶμα) τόδε (or with an inversion, according to metrical position, τόδε σῆμα): 'this tomb'; ἐνθάδ(ε) + proper noun + form of κείμαι: 'here ... lie(s)'; τόδ' ἄγαλμα (ἀνέθηκε): 'person xyz dedicated this gift'; εὐξάμενος δεκάτην: 'having vowed as a tithe'.

On the other hand, epigram owes much to epic and elegiac diction, and this connection has both stylistic and ideological implications. First, the use of a kind of diction that has already been consolidated in epic and elegy endows epigram with stylistic features and formulae that are typical of festive and sympotic performances. By contrast, the style of the earliest inscriptions had been mostly plain, without ornamental elements. Secondly, epic and elegy lend epigram elements of their respective characteristic ideologies. As a result, the ideology of epigram is at the same time aristocratic, aiming to exalt individual value and excellence, and yet – thanks to elegy (see below) – attentive to new values of hoplite warfare, as we can see from the large number of epigrammatic expressions that may be found in the few fragments of Callinus and Tyrtaeus. By contrast, at least for a large part of the sixth century, a properly civic ideology is less present.

Elegiac epigram changed enormously in the course of the fifth century across all of Greece. The changes affected above all funerary epigram, perhaps partly because of its importance in the celebratory atmosphere following the victories in the Persian Wars. The most important cities – Sparta, Athens, Corinth among others – commissioned epigrams to commemorate their dead on monuments erected both on the battle sites and in the city itself (see 1–3, 131, 155 *CEG*). The focus of composition is no longer the dead individual (in the case of collective monuments he is no longer named in the text of the epigram) but the victorious event, the heroic glory of the fallen, and the splendour of the city that erects the monuments. New themes enter the epigrammatic repertoire; elegy, epic, but also all of lyric, offer a useful source of themes and verbal expressions. Some of these epigrams (for example the epigram for those fallen at Thermopylae, 'Simonides' 22 *FGE*) were to

⁵⁷ On deixis see D'Alessio, this vol., 115–20.

⁵⁸ A classification of funeral epigrams according to recurring structures can be found in Peek 1955; for dedicatory epigrams see Lazzarini 1976.

become famous and started spreading beyond the places where they were inscribed. Thus epigram begins to be increasingly separated from the need for an object, and the text circulates above all in sympotic circles, just like contemporary elegy. In a way, the genre has come full circle: after using for centuries the diction and expressive structures of elegy and epic, elegiac epigram becomes available for performance as a form of elegy, brief, dense and full of meaning. For a brief period, the distance between elegy and epigram decreases, but differences do not depend only on length. A deep difference in communicative structure remains between sympotic elegy and epigram: while much of elegy has a dialogical structure and is open to reuse and continuation (see next section), epigram maintains a character of completeness and invites reflection and appreciation more than a reply. In the Hellenistic period, there were collections of epigrams attributed to great (and less great) poets of the archaic and early classical periods: Anacreon, Simonides, but also Aeschylus, Plato and Alcibiades. These were probably single-author collections as well as anthologies. It is difficult to ascertain just how reliable they are in attributing epigrams to authors.⁵⁹ The question of attribution apart, however, it is certain that between the sixth and the fifth centuries, great poets composed epigrams about both real and fictitious events and persons, thus transforming the character of the genre, and paving the way for the creation of one of the more productive genres of Greek literature.

Elegy as a literary genre

The most obvious characteristic of elegy is its capacity to adapt itself to different circumstances and subjects. As a consequence, it makes little sense to end with definite conclusions. Instead we will restrict ourselves to three general questions:

- (1) What kinds of function did elegy perform?
- (2) What is the relationship between the diction of elegy and epic? And in particular: does the dialectal uniformity of the preserved texts go back to the point of composition or is it the consequence of a process of normalisation that took place in Ionic- and Attic-speaking areas?
- (3) Finally: is it meaningful to speak of typically elegiac characteristics that may be assumed by poems in other metres in areas where elegy is not attested – especially Lesbos?

The functions of elegy

We have mentioned more than once the different kinds of function elegiac poems and epigrams can fulfil in the different contexts where they were

⁵⁹ *FGE*, pp. 119–30, but also Gentili 1968, 42.

Elegy

performed or inscribed. Separating functions and occasions of a composition is of course impossible: the content is always shaped with a view to the occasion, to achieve a particular aim. Changing one of these factors affects all others. The great versatility of elegy is unquestionable. Elegy is able to engage with very different aspects of the lives (and deaths) of individuals and communities (interpreted both as groups and as political bodies). As a result, it can fulfil a multitude of functions. In fact, most or all of the functions performed by the different poetic genres are performed also by elegy, combined in various ways. A narrative song, which aims to commemorate or praise the deeds of ancestors, can turn into an exhortatory poem, when circumstances of performance require that the audience models its behaviour on that of its ancestors. The different functions of a song are not all and forever fixed in the act of composition. The constant reuse typical of all archaic poetry is typical also of elegy, and is if anything more pronounced there.

None the less, it may be worth trying to outline a possible synthesis. We may theoretically discern three functions: telling (a), making (b) and causing action (c). This typology does not presuppose an analogous typology of poems: the same poem may have more than one function at the same time.

- (a) *Telling*: elegy often tells the present or the past, with the aim of formulating a model of reality, and above all of establishing a point of view. This is a thoughtful and pensive kind of elegy, inviting debates and responses. It is the kind of elegy that is typical of sympotic gatherings, dialogical and calling for an answer. The people it mentions are mostly the participants in the *symposion*, and the *symposion* is often also the subject of the poem. Mimnermus' 'pensive' fragments, Xenophanes' elegies and a large part of the Theognidean *syllogê* all are in this category.
- (b) *Making*: elegy builds a monument out of the memory of brave men and glorious acts past and present, a *mnêma* to be looked at as much as listened to, both by the immediate addressees and by those who will enjoy the poem in the future. Performance and inscription on physical objects converge in accomplishing this function which characterises poems like Simonides' Plataea poem or the long poems about wars and the foundation of cities like Mimnermus' *Smyrneis*; this is also the primary function of the inscribed epigram. Here communication proceeds only in one direction, from sender to receiver, and there is no potential for dialogue or swapping roles. Communication is authoritative and sometimes quite authoritarian.
- (c) *Causing action*: the function of causing an action, explicitly required by elegiac song of its own audience. This is an exhortatory kind of elegy,

sometimes coexisting with other functions, sometimes in isolation. The memory of the past (e.g. Mimn. 14 W about the strength and valour of a famous ancestor) is not only a behavioural model, but can become the cause of immediate and necessary action. This function seems to dominate in Callinus and Tyrtaeus: past and present converge to transform the audience into an active subject, ready to perform deeds of valour. As in the case of (b), the sender does not offer a viewpoint, to be adopted or to be engaged in dialogue with by others.

One consequence of the complexity of the different functions elegy can perform – and one elegiac piece can fulfil more than one of these functions – is a corresponding complexity in the respective roles of the various parties involved in its performance. The dialogical character of much sympotic elegy makes the roles of sender and receiver largely interchangeable. Therefore, even if there is an author, elegiac compositions can always be added to or changed, so much so in fact that not even the threatening σφραγίς ('seal') of Theognis – 'These are the verses of Theognis the Megarian, and he is renowned among all men' (22–3) – could preserve his poetry from interferences and additions.

The ties with the composer are stabler and firmer for the poems where the dominant function is 'making' or 'causing action': the *Smyrneis* is indissolubly tied to the name of Mimnermus, and the *Salamis* (whatever its primary performance context might have been) is tied to Solon. But even works in which the author's mark is stronger and more authoritative may be reused: Tyr. 12.13–16 W, urging the ἀνὴρ νέος ('young man/warrior') to stand firm in the first rank of the phalanx, reappears as lines 1003–6 of the Theognidean *syllogê*, but the function of these verses is greatly different from the original one. In the context of the Theognidean *symposion*, Tyrtaeus' verses recall the atmosphere and the values of another *symposion* (this one indeed authoritative). A slight textual variation underlines the change in function: an ἀνὴρ σοφός ('wise man': Thgn. 1004) takes the place of the ἀνὴρ νέος. This way the two couplets assume a general gnomic value, valid for all those who share in the wisdom of the *symposion*.

It is then very difficult to define the role of the composer towards his own poetry.⁶⁰ The segments of Solon or Mimnermus in Theognis show that the symposiasts in the fifth century who sang Theognis' elegies also sang *certain* elegies by Solon and Mimnermus as though they were Theognis' own. In the process of reuse and recomposition for new performances, the composer turns in many cases into a semi-mythical figure, the starting point of a

⁶⁰ On this relationship see Nagy 1990, 339–81, especially 373–81.

Elegy

tradition in which, in the course of time, different audiences come to recognise themselves: a tradition in which the poetic 'I' is only a temporary function.

Elegiac (and epic) diction

The language of elegy as transmitted to us is characterised by a predominantly Ionic dialect, frequent epic forms, and at the same time a number of local dialect forms. The role of each of these elements varies from period to period and author to author. But the available data is uncertain and based on written texts, which were subject to long processes of redefinition and normalisation during transmission. In the original oral performance local dialect traits would certainly have been more frequent. Moreover the reuse of the same texts in different circumstances and places suggests an adaptation not only in content, but also, as far as possible, in the dominant phono-linguistic characteristics.

Dover argued for the theory that elegiac diction originated directly from Ionic Greek rather than from epic language, but this hypothesis presents various problems.⁶¹ The alternative solution, a derivation of elegy from epic,⁶² certainly of epic in the form it has come down to us, is not satisfactory either. It takes into account neither the stratification of early Greek epic, nor the fact that in traditional poetry language and content form a shared heritage, variously modified to suit specific places, poetic forms and poets' personalities. Epic and elegy both draw on this common traditional heritage. It is not a mere repertory of words and phrases, which happen to be codified in a particular dialect and metre; rather, it is a heritage of songs, themes and also verbal templates, a heritage shared across the Greek world, in spite of some geographical differentiation, and increasingly homogenised as the process of panhellenisation gathered pace.⁶³

In other words, elegy and epic are cognate genres, which developed synchronically.⁶⁴ Their relationship was one of functional and ideological differentiation. Two recurring themes in both elegy and the Homeric poems – the *aidôs* (shame) of the individual in relation to the community (a), and the hoplite battle formation (b) – will help to describe this relationship.

- a) Callinus 1.2ff. W is a clear representation of *aidôs* inciting the fighters to valour in battle not as individuals and/or members of a clan, but with a view to how they are perceived by the citizens: οὐδ' αἰδεῖσθ' ἀμφιπερικτίονας | ὧδε λίην μεθιέντες; 'Don't those who live round about make you feel ashamed of

⁶¹ Dover 1964. ⁶² This is the prevailing opinion; see for example Barron *et al.* 1985, 119–20.

⁶³ Aloni 1998, 56–63. ⁶⁴ Bowie 1986a, 14, and Zanetto 2004.

being so utterly passive?’ (trans. Gerber). The situation is very similar to *Il.* 6.441–3: ἀλλὰ μάλ’ αἰνῶς | αἰδέομαι Τρώας καὶ Τρωάδας ἔλκεσιπέπλους | αἶ κε κακὸς ὧς νόσφιν ἄλυσκάζω πολέμοιο (‘but I am dreadfully ashamed when I look upon Trojans, the men and the women with trailing robes, if I were to shirk battle like a coward?’). Likewise at *Il.* 12.310–28, Sarpedon spurs on Glaukos by invoking the need to protect his *kleos* in the opinion of the Lycians. In this context fighting in the first ranks (*meta prôtoisi*) guarantees a public acknowledgement not different from that due to the brave hoplite in Tyrtaeus’ elegies.

The same topics are dealt with in the same period using two forms of literary communication. Epic and elegy appear to be complementary in terms of ideology and to present different alternatives suited for different performance contexts. Valour (*aretê*) boosts not a fighter’s individual glory but the safety of the whole *polis* and the reputation of the descendants (Tyrtaeus 10.1–14 W and 12.13ff. W: cf. *Il.* 6.440–6).

- b) A compact battle formation and the courage of everybody in it guarantee the safety of the entire group of fighters (Tyrtaeus 11.11–14 W: cf. *Il.* 5.527–32). The hoplites’ ranks praised by Tyrtaeus (11.30ff. W) face each other ‘foot by foot, shield on shield’ and fight the enemy ‘breast to breast’. Likewise, in the *Iliad*, the phalanxes are grouped around the two Ajaxes (13.126f.) and the soldiers await the battle against the enemy, fighting spear on spear and shield on shield (13.130f.). It is unlikely that hoplite elements are original in the context of epic, where κλέος comes from individual exploits. They might instead be a theme of martial elegy, gradually introduced into the text of the *Iliad*. In fact there can be little doubt that the version of the *Iliad* at our disposal must be a text shaped in the archaic period, the age of Tyrtaeus and Callinus.

The addressees of epic and elegy, at least in the seventh and sixth centuries, were the same citizen-soldiers who were the protagonists of the contemporary transformation of socio-political structures, a transformation in which hoplite warfare played a major role.⁶⁵ Indeed the *Iliad* kept its exhortatory function in hoplite society until the threshold of the classical period: the fourth-century orator Lycurgus (*In Leocr.* 103) reports how Hector’s appeal to the Trojans (*Il.* 15.494–9) inflamed Athenian minds on the eve of the battle of Marathon.

Because of this close contact between elegy and epic, the well-known panhellenisation of epic suggests a parallel development for elegy: the poetic form of elegy, but above all its texts, may have spread across Greece from the Ionian world, just as epic did. This panhellenic dissemination may have involved also

⁶⁵ On hoplites see Hanson 1991, Cartledge 2001; and on the relationship between hoplites and citizenship, Stein-Hölkeskamp 1989, 124ff., 132.

Elegy

the absorption of other already existing forms of elegy, such as the (possible) Peloponnesian public funerary elegy.⁶⁶ In the course of the same process elegiac diction would have been contaminated with local characteristics.

The use of the same authoritative and panhellenic artificial dialect is in fact the best explanation for the wide diffusion of elegy across space and time and for the variety of functions accomplished by the *elegeion*: from sympotic song to philosophical reflection, from mourning to public celebration, from historical narrative to exhortation.

To conclude, an account of elegiac diction may perhaps start from the reuse of traditional poetic diction, a reuse and reformulation in new terms, powerful enough to create a genre with its own identity and powerful enough to influence the parallel development of epic (certainly epic as it is presented to us today by the Homeric poems). The original overlaps with epic diction represent the use of poetic language at, as it were, 'degree zero', which allowed the elegiac singer to address a large audience, the same large fairly undifferentiated audience as that of epic performances. However this 'degree zero' is subject to a process of progressive modification, in which the contexts and subject matter that are central to elegy play an important role: on the one hand a lexical refinement creating a 'group language', suitable for the different contexts in which elegy developed: the *symposion* and/or the *polis*;⁶⁷ on the other hand a diversification depending on contents and the creation of specific kinds of diction, like the highly formulaic diction of martial elegy, which translates the socio-political hoplite revolution into poetic language. The trend towards an increasingly independent elegiac diction culminates in the detachment from Homeric diction in fifth-century Attic elegy. When epic poetry becomes fixed and is no longer a productive genre, elegy assumes its own specific linguistic features, derived especially from Attic Greek. The development of epic and elegy side by side now gives way to a regeneration of the latter. As epic poetry is fixed, elegy begins to develop in a space of its own, from Antimachus in the fourth century to the Alexandrians, to the Roman and then post-Renaissance traditions of the genre. But that is a different story.

Nothing to do with Lesbos? A conclusion about elegiac definition

By way of conclusion it is convenient to recall that we have no evidence for elegiac compositions in Lesbos. Recently, there have been attempts to identify iambic aspects in Lesbian poetry, even though the metres used are not

⁶⁶ For the notion of a Peloponnesian funerary elegy, see above note 5. ⁶⁷ Aloni 1981, 62–4.

iambic.⁶⁸ Is something similar possible for elegy? Scholars have argued that Latin elegy, especially Ovid, finds one of its ancestors in Sappho.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it is particularly the erotic subject matter, central to Latin elegy, but not after all crucial for Greek archaic elegy, which connects Sappho's and Ovid's poetry. In fact, without the formal marker, i.e. the couplet, it seems difficult to identify internal parameters for distinguishing elegy from other poetic forms. The sheer variety of subject matters, functions and occasions makes elegy an elusive genre. Sappho and Alcaeus certainly incited their own audience to do something, told it about the past and present, had a lot to say about the real context of the *symposion*, recalled its rules. But that is not enough. Without the elegiac form, elegy stops being recognisable. And that, as it were, brings us back to where we started. To understand 'elegy' as compositions in elegiac couplets is not unduly restrictive or unduly formalist, but is simply its only possible definition.

FURTHER READING

Aloni and Iannucci 2007 is a book-length treatment of elegy, enlarging the scope of this chapter. Gerber 1997b also discusses elegy in general. On specific issues see the following.

Elegy as a genre and ancient testimonies: West 1974, Bowie 1986a, Bartol 1993.

Metre: Barnes 1995.

Elegy and the *symposion*: Vetta 1984, Murray 1990a, Slings 2000c.

Theognidea: Figueira and Nagy 1985, Edmunds 1997, Vetta 2000.

Exhortatory elegy: Bowie 1990, Irwin 2005.

Narrative elegy: Bowie 2001a.

The 'New Archilochus': Obbink 2006, West 2006 and the appendix in Aloni and Iannucci 2007.

The 'New Simonides': Boedeker and Sider 2001.

Elegy in the fifth century: Iannucci 2002, Wilson 2003.

Epigram: Gentili 1968, Day 1989, Ecker 1990, Svenbro 1993, Cassio 1994, Bruss 2005.

Elegy and epigram as cognate genres: Nagy 1990 and Aloni 1998.

For individual elegiac poets see the footnotes, and for editions, translations and commentaries see below, pp. 388–95.

⁶⁸ Aloni 2001b and Andrisano 2001. ⁶⁹ Bessone 2003a and 2003b.