

**Benjamin ACOSTA-HUGHES and Arthur VERHOOGT**  
**Readers of Ancient Lyric in Graeco-Roman Egypt**

The preservation of Archaic lyric in the Hellenistic period embodies, in effect, cultural reception of three kinds: preservation of text itself, commentary and exegesis of earlier art-forms, and poetic intertext, whether through allusion, citation of "motto", or other type of re-configuration. This three-tiered preservation is remarkable in itself. Archaic lyric is not the easiest Greek poetry available to a later era in terms of subject matter and language. Most of it is from the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, most is occasional, and much is local. The poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus, for example, evokes contemporary Lesbos, and touches upon referents familiar to a known audience. The readers of this poetry in Greco-Roman Egypt are at several removes from this poetry's origins. Archaic lyric is further the product of an oral, performative song culture. In its dialects, its local references and its markers of occasion it reflects the communities of which it is the artistic voice. The removal of this poetry to Greco-Roman Egypt can be understood as an act of translation at multiple levels: from utterance to text, from contemporary voice to preserved art form and cultural monument, from the pre -Persian War Hellenic world to the post-Alexander one.

This paper, the collaborative effort of a papyrologist and a literary scholar, attempts an assessment of the audience of archaic lyric in Greek and Roman Egypt. Through an analysis of the papyri of, in particular, Alcaeus, Sappho and Simonides we hope to delineate what we can of their audience and their reading in a later era, and to pose more clearly, if not answer, some of the following questions. Who read Archaic lyric in the Greco-Roman period and under what circumstances? How was Archaic lyric read, in what sort of editions and with what editorial conventions? What do extant papyri tell us about evaluation of authors, and about selection of authors? What can we observe of level of difficulty in the interaction with these earlier poems, and how is this difficulty addressed? What can we say of the cultural value of the singers of archaic lyric in a later age, and in a different socio-cultural setting?