

By the Roman period, Alcaeus' non-political poems were often considered much inferior to those that concerned civil strife on Lesbos (see e.g. Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.71; Quint. 10.1; Dion. Hal. 5.421). Accordingly, commentators on his life and works tended to focus on the political aspect of both, to the exclusion of other elements of his work. I wish to argue that the reason for this focus is not only poetic taste, but also the inherent spectacle of Alcaeus' rivalry with Pittacus.

The Chamaeleonic method, that is, the ancient tendency to infer an author's biography from the content of his works is, sufficiently well understood. In Alcaeus' case, his political poems about the tyrannies of Myrsilus and Pittacus created a fascinating story of betrayal, civil strife, and exile. These universally relevant themes, combined with Alcaeus' highly personal tone, make his political poems the most appealing of his corpus. In addition, I argue that the particular figures involved may have enhanced the “spectacle” of these poems: according to Alexandrian scholars, Alcaeus was one of the “Nine Lyric Poets,” while Pittacus was one of the “Seven Sages”—both designations indicative of their cultural importance. A highly charged match between two such “celebrities,” so to speak, was irresistible.

In my paper, the biographical traditions of Archilochus and Euripides will serve as *comparanda* for the development of Alcaeus'. In Archilochus' case, the role of spectacle is once again visible in his well known destruction of the Lycambids. Euripides will provide the evidence of the condensation over time of a biographical tradition, and especially the way in which a tradition becomes more and more one-dimensional and generally negative (Lefkowitz 1981). As a counterpoint, I will use Horace's picture of Alcaeus, which seems to represent a conscious departure from the prevailing biographical and literary tradition. Horace's reception of Alcaeus is unique in its appreciation of Alcaeus as a multifaceted poet, and especially as a love poet. Indeed, he openly criticizes the vulgar masses for being transfixed by “fights and expelled tyrants” (Hor. *Carm.* 2.13.31-32), rather than by the higher call of Alcaeus' and Sappho's love poetry.

By looking at the relationship between the reception of Alcaeus' poetry and his biographical tradition, I hope to show that the role of spectacle and sensationalism is key in understanding how ancient biographies developed.