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Sailing and Singing: Alcaeus at Sea

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Textual Events

Performance and the Lyric in Early Greece

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PART III: LYRIC ENCOUNTERS

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poetry commands substantially less freedom to manipulate the pragmatic features of language than poems intended for reading.[80] As we saw, scholars seem to find it far less difficult to acknowledge this liberty in so-called 'sympotic' poems, allowing male poets to address distant interlocutors, to evoke fictional situations (impending waves, keeping the guard on a ship) and to express their feelings in abstract terms. In the case of Sappho, the options have been polarized between two extremes (not always necessarily represented by different scholars): Sappho the chorus-leader, fully immersed in the ritual life of her community, and/or the inward-looking author, producing poems meant for written dissemination. We should allow for the possibility that many, if not perhaps most, of Sappho's poems were intended to be performed *outside* the ritual performance proper, on which their words provided a very much needed (and obviously valued) commentary and interpretation. It was, it would seem, not their embeddedness within a ritually formalized communicative occasion, but their ability to look at this occasion from the margin, also providing models of response, that guaranteed their diffusion and survival beyond their original context.

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[80] See D'Alessio (2004) for an exploration of this issue from a comparative and linguistic point of view, focusing mainly on Pindar and time-deixis (with several examples), and D'Alessio (2009) for a brief, more general survey. The materials collected in Finnegan (1977) and her considerations on this matter are still fundamental to the appreciation of the full range of orally performed poetry, but are too often overlooked in theoretical (and also in practical) discussions on the relationship between orality and written culture in ancient Greece.

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Sailing and Singing

Alcaeus at Sea

Anna Uhlig

What does it mean to sing the sea? The sea was at the centre of the ancient Greek world, both literally and figuratively. Yet, despite its prominence in recent historical scholarship,[1] the marine sphere is often given short shrift in studies of poetry, treated as a symbol which only gestures towards other, more weighty matters. The tendency to suppress the poetic sea finds its clearest expression in the near universal agreement that a series of poems that vividly describe the struggles of sailors at sea in fact functions as a set of allegories for the political fortunes of their author, Alcaeus, and his confederates in early sixth-century Mytilene. These poems are most commonly referred to as Alcaeus' 'ship-of-state' poems, though I prefer, for reasons that will soon become clear, the designation 'maritime' poems. Contrary to what many now believe, our scholarly consensus regarding the allegorical status of these verses is surprisingly recent and coincides, and not by chance, as I will argue, with our interest in questions of performance context and our desire to see our surviving archaic poetry situated within the song culture of ancient Greece. But precisely because of the strong links between Alcaeus' poems and the modern notion of archaic song culture, a reappraisal of the maritime element of Alcaeus' so-called 'ship-of-state' offers an important

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[1] Most notably, Horden and Purcell (2000) and Broodbank (2013).

corrective to recent approaches to poetic performance in two related ways. Firstly, it can help us to better understand some of the unspoken assumptions, not all of them credible, that guide our current thinking about archaic song. Secondly, because the sea is a realm of revelations and transformations, of shapeshifters and unexpected wisdom, the precinct of Athena and Dionysus as much as that of Poseidon,[2] it allows us to re-imagine ancient performance in terms that fit the shifting and uncertain character of the sea rather than the fixed and unyielding structures of dry land.

My argument falls into three main sections. In the first, I explore the broader frame for reading maritime and marine poetry in terms of dry-land context. In particular, I examine how William Slater's discussion of the metaphor of a 'symposium at sea' has led to a certain blurring of the boundaries between content and context when it comes to the marine sphere. In the second section, I turn to the more specific question of allegory and analyse the motivation behind the recent return to an allegorical reading of Alcaeus. I focus my examination on the seminal work of Bruno Gentili, and the crucial role that an allegorical understanding of Alcaeus played in his larger project of placing archaic song within its original performance context, a goal which, however much it has been revised by scholars in subsequent years, still largely informs our approach to the analysis of archaic lyric in performance. Finally, I turn to the poems themselves and suggest that a renewed attention to their surface meaning reveals a maritime aesthetics that can form the basis of a new model of ancient performance.

LAND AND SEA

I begin not with Alcaeus, but with the thirsty sailor of Archilochus fr. 4, calling to his shipmates to join him in a drink. In both content and interpretative history, this lovely fragment perfectly encapsulates the ways in which marine themes complicate our sense of the boundary between the real and the figurative. I quote the entire fragment as printed by West.

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[2] See Detienne (1996) 53–68, Slater (1976).

φρα[
    ξεινοι.[
δεῖπνον δ' ου[
    οὔτ' ἐμοὶ ωσαῖ[5
ἀλλ' ἄγε σὺν κώθωνι θοῆς διὰ σέλματα νηὸς
    φοίτα καὶ κοίλων πώματ' ἄφελκε κάδων,
ἄγρει δ' οἶνον ἐρυθρὸν ἀπὸ τρυγός· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡμεῖς
    νηφέμεν ἐν φυλακῆι τῆιδε δυνησόμεθα.

...guests...meal...nor to me...
But come, pass through the benches of the swift ship with the drinking cup and pull the lids from the hollow casks, draw the red wine down to the lees, for we cannot be sober on this watch.[3]

At its heart, the song expresses a straightforward and easily intelligible scenario: a sailor wants to get drunk with his crewmates. He calls for the wine to be poured and entreats his comrades to drink to excess. Yet this simple scenario is presented in terms that have proved stubbornly inscrutable to modern critics. In fact, there are few details in these four lines that we can claim to fully understand. Are the σέλματα of line six benches or the ship's decking? If benches, are the hollow casks (κοίλων κάδων) of the following line stored under them? When the speaker instructs his unidentified companion to pass through the benches (φοίτα), does he want his addressee to make a single trip down the ship or is it an iterative action that he is hoping for? Does πώματ' ἄφελκε refer to the pots' lids being removed, and if so, is it for the first time? or does the instruction call for draughts to be drawn from the vessels? And, most pointedly, is the boat in motion, with the singer and his comrades aboard and rowing, as the reference to σέλματα suggests? Or is the vessel beached (perhaps for the night?) with the men deployed on the strand, as ἐν φυλακῆι τῆιδε would seem to indicate?[4]

The confusion points to one obvious difficulty of maritime poetry; seafaring is a highly technical business, and while archaic poets could, or at least so it seems, expect their audiences to be notionally conversant with the jargon of ships and the sea, we modern interpreters are all too often flummoxed by specialized terminology and the

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[3] All translations are my own.

[4] For discussion, see Gerber (1981). It is unclear to me why Burnett (1983) 39 states that the poem's 'pretended occasion is a storm at sea' when there is no direct reference to the sea *tout court*, let alone sailing conditions.

intricacies of a life lived on the water.[5] But even if we miraculously acquired a full working knowledge of ancient Greek seafaring, a more basic gap between past and present would remain. Some decades ago queries about benches and wine jars or the relative positioning of speaker and ship might have been thought to exhaust the question of 'context', on the assumption that the conditions of the poem's performance would be indistinguishable from the words deployed therein. But few critics today would conflate the fictional or 'mimetic' performance scenario created within the frame of a lyric poem with the 'real-life' circumstances in which such a song historically found voice. We are now much more circumspect in our treatment of, for example, Sappho's whimsical prayers to Aphrodite (discussed by D'Alessio in this volume, p. 35) or the various contexts—private symposia, formal public ceremonies, marriage rituals—that Pindar invokes in his epinician songs.[6] We have learned to discern the play between what Claude Calame has called 'the "real," *referential* communication situation, with its particular social and psychological parameters, and the enunciation situation as it is glimpsed in the utterance through the use of language'.[7] Or, put somewhat less artfully, between context and content.

In the light of our heightened appreciation of this distinction, the idea that the declarations of a poetic speaker should be taken literally can appear almost comically misguided. Ewen Bowie lampooned the foolishness of such pedantic disputes thirty years ago, when he considered the possible circumstances surrounding the lines of Archilochus now under consideration:

> Should we conclude that Archilochus sang this song for the first time while on guard by a beached ship? If so I am tempted to suggest that the reason we have no more of the song is that the singer's throat was cut by a Thracian guerrilla: for real guard-duty is not effective if punctuated by drunken song.[8]

Bowie argued that despite their maritime setting, the verses were in fact intended for performance at a symposium. Archilochus was

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[5] The authoritative treatment of ancient maritime technology is still Casson (1995), first edition Casson (1971), who provides a very helpful glossary of Greek and Latin nautical terms (389–402).

[6] The mimetic flexibility of these scenarios is elegantly explored by e.g. Athanassaki (2012), Budelmann (2017).

[7] Calame (1995) 5.　　　[8] Bowie (1986) 16.

singing *about* a sailor's watch, but he was singing *for* a sympotic audience, men who may once have been to sea, and may well have been bound to return there in the future, but who were, at least for the duration of Archilochus' song, firmly planted on dry land, enjoying their drinks in the communal institution that, perhaps more than any other, defined life in an archaic *polis*.[9] For Bowie, these verses would allow for a kind of 'vicarious sailing', to paraphrase Nancy Felson,[10] inviting the participants in the symposium to imagine themselves aboard ship—or on the strand beside one—from the comfort of their drinking couches.

By conjuring the rough-and-ready atmosphere of the marine world within the secure confines of the sympotic gathering, the audience could delight in momentarily assuming the louche mores of the sea. Much of their pleasure would derive from an awareness of the contrast between the 'real' circumstances of their sympotic gathering and the 'imagined' world of song. And there is support for such a reading within the poem itself, particularly if we take account of the fragmentary opening lines, which speak of guests (ξεῖνοι) and a meal (δεῖπνον), references which might plausibly be linked to a sympotic context in which comrades gather for food and drink,[11] though this is certainly not the only possible direction for interpretation.[12] Our difficulty in pinpointing the speaker's location may also arise from a more general tension between land and sea in the poem. As noted, the mention of σέλματα (whether benches or decking) points towards a position aboard ship, whereas the designation ἐν φυλακῆι suggests that the sailors have already disembarked and are speaking from the shore. If the ambiguity is not simply a result of our modern ignorance, then we should understand the bifurcated setting as a conscious attempt to unsettle the poem's internal geography. The two locations divide the sailor's song between land and sea, mirroring the relationship between the poem's marine content and its terrestrial context.

It hardly needs to be stated that such poetic play between real and fictive settings is not limited to poems with marine themes. Yet it is also true that the sea seems to have been particularly amenable to this type of contextual manipulation. William Slater first identified

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[9] On the symposium in general, see Murray (1990), Hobden (2013), Cazzato, Obbink and Prodi (2016).

[10] Felson (1999) 6.　　　[11] Bowie (1986) 17.

[12] See, for example, Gerber (1981) 2.

this much broader figurative network which imagined urban, and in particular sympotic, contexts in terms better suited to the marine sphere, dubbing the phenomenon the 'symposium at sea'.[13] Through the analysis of diverse passages, from Pindar to Timaeus of Taurominium to Horace, Slater identifies a tendency to imagine the symposium taking place on the water, arguing 'that the behaviour, language, and apparatus of the symposium gave rise to a metaphor of the symposium-ship which is related in some way to Dionysiac cult, and that this formalized metaphor persisted until Roman times'.[14] As Bowie himself recognized, Slater's identification of the deep-seated affinities between sympotic and maritime spheres lends further weight to a sympotic contextualization of Archilochus fr. 4.[15] But Slater's model adds an additional layer of symbolism to Bowie's schema. Slater's argument is not simply a question of understanding marine poems within the historical context of sympotic performance. He does not merely set the maritime content in some nebulous relation to, or tension with, a sympotic context. By introducing the idea of a 'formalized metaphor', Slater claims that these maritime images figuratively represent elements of the symposium. In other words, he invites us to understand poetry of the sea as not only *for* but, more pointedly, *about* the symposium.

There is an important distinction to be drawn between the positions of Slater and Bowie, that is, between historical questions regarding performance context and interpretative questions about what a given poem might 'mean'. In recent years the boundary between these two spheres has tended to be somewhat vague, and those of us who study archaic poetry have, at times, been guilty of treating context and content almost interchangeably. Without wishing in any way to question the fundamental accuracy of Slater's insight, it is nevertheless important to remember that not every maritime image is a metaphor for the symposium, though it might be influenced by a discourse that at times links the two. It is possible to imagine the symposium as a ship at sea, but it is equally true that the symposium was a widespread and heterodox institution that served as host to songs of all shapes and sizes, including songs about one of the most

[13] Slater (1976) *passim.*
[14] Slater (1976) 161. Scholars have continued to add evidence and nuance to Slater's initial schema, most noteworthy amongst whom are Lissarrague (1990a) 107–22 and Csapo (2003); see also Davies (1978), Steiner (2011), Kowalzig (2013), and Gagné (2016).
[15] Bowie (1986) 17 n. 21.

essential features of life in the ancient Mediterranean, namely seafaring. As scholars we should not limit ourselves to the single interpretative strategy of plotting equivalences, however captivating, between 'this' and 'that'. There are, as they say, many more fish in the sea.

THE OLD ALLEGORY AND THE SEA

Within an interpretative climate that has taught us to read poems of the sea as metaphors for what we do on the land, an allegorical reading of Alcaeus' so-called 'ship of state' poems appears quite natural and unremarkable. But the near-universal acceptance of this position can mask the reasons behind the relatively recent shift in our current assumptions. Central to this shift is the work of Bruno Gentili and his desire to situate Alcaeus' poetry within the cultural and political context of early sixth-century Mytilene.[16] In ascribing such importance to Gentili, I do not mean to imply that he was first to suggest that Alcaeus should be read allegorically, or even that his reading of these works decisively turned the tables of twentieth-century scholarship. Rather, Gentili represents the link between (maritime) allegory and performance that has made an allegorical interpretation of Alcaeus such a resilient, or what William Clark would call *charismatic*,[17] idea amongst scholars today. But in order to better understand how Gentili shapes current scholarly orthodoxy, it is useful to first briefly explore what an allegorical approach to Alcaeus looked like before his intervention.

Our modern allegorical approach to Alcaeus has its roots in ancient critical commentary, a pedigree that has done much to solidify the recent scholarly consensus. It is, for that reason, worth noting that the ancient evidence is far less conclusive than is often assumed, and tends, so far as it can be coherently construed, towards a rather different picture from that which Gentili communicates. Our most compelling evidence for ancient allegorical reading of Alcaeus comes from the noted late first-century AD Homeric scholar, Heraclitus,

[16] On Alcaeus' dates, see Hutchinson (2001) 187–8 with bibliography. A very different alternative to Gentili's approach to Alcaeus from that proposed here is explored in Fearn's chapter in this volume.
[17] Clark (2007).

whose penchant for allegorical reading was so extreme as to earn him the moniker 'the Allegorist' amongst his contemporaries and successors.[18] In the course of his treatise on *Homeric Problems*, Heraclitus famously identified Alcaeus' excessive use of naval allegories, engaging, along the way, in some playful puns at the poet's expense: 'The islander (i.e. Alcaeus) is awash in a sea of allegory (κατακόρως ἐν ταῖς ἀλληγορίαις ὁ νησιώτης θαλαττεύει) and compares the majority of the ills that he suffered at the hands of the tyrants to storms at sea'.[19] This comment is at the root of all modern claims that Alcaeus' ships are political allegories, and as such it is worth exploring in some detail.

Heraclitus' observations are rooted in a long-standing ancient tradition of allegorical reading,[20] yet this approach was far from universally accepted by ancient critics. Heraclitus himself acknowledges this resistance when he openly disparages those who reject allegory, and respond, as he sees it, to the superficial meaning of the texts while missing their deeper truths.[21] There are few ancient discussions of Alcaeus' maritime poems which might give us a sense of how Heraclitus' approach compared to those of other ancient critics (one important exception is treated later in this section). But such comparative analysis is possible, at least in one instance, for Archilochus, and it proves illuminating.

Heraclitus points to the lines that we refer to as Archilochus fr. 105 at the beginning of his treatise, immediately preceding his discussion of Alcaeus' allegorical ships, as the paradigmatic example of what it means to say one thing but mean another.[22] The lines describe the onset of a storm at sea as perceived, or so our ancient sources tell us, from aboard ship.

> Γλαῦχ', ὅρα· βαθὺς γὰρ ἤδη κύμασιν ταράσσεται
> πόντος, ἀμφὶ δ' ἄκρα Γυρέων ὀρθὸν ἵσταται νέφος,
> σῆμα χειμῶνος, κιχάνει δ' ἐξ ἀελπτίης φόβος.

Look, Glaucus, already the deep sea is stirred by waves and a cloud stands straight around the peaks of Gyrae, a sign of storm, and all of a sudden fear overtakes me.

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[18] Russell and Konstan (2005) xi.   [19] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 5.9.
[20] Lamberton (1986) 26, Struck (2004) 151–6; on early allegory, see Ford (2002) 67–90, Morgan (2000) 62–6, Struck (2004) 77–111.
[21] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 3.2, 26.40; for discussion, see Struck (2004) 152.
[22] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 5.1–4.

For Heraclitus the verses are a martial allegory, an image of the toils of war that menaced the poet while he was 'caught up in the perils of Thrace'.[23] But when we compare Heraclitus' position to those espoused by others who discuss these lines elsewhere, we find the Allegorist's claim of hidden meaning to be the exception. Theophrastus quotes the same lines in his treatise *On Weather Signs* (45.332–7 Sider-Brunschön) as an example of how one can detect a coming storm; he treats the verses as an accurate reflection of meteorological conditions and betrays no knowledge of any allegorical import.[24] Plutarch also quotes the verses in his *Moralia* (169a), as an example of how men's behaviour is warped by superstition, causing them to act against their own interests even in the most perilous circumstances. As with Theophrastus, we find a complete indifference to any hidden symbolic import. Indeed, the gravity of the situation described by the poem's literal content (i.e., the mortal danger of a storm at sea) is precisely what motivates Plutarch's comments on the scourge of superstition: in the face of such dangers, the whole of the sailors' attention should be focused on their ship, not on prayers to the gods.[25]

Next to Heraclitus, the most important testimony regarding the ancient interpretation of Alcaeus is the fragmentary commentary found in *P.Oxy.* 2307 fr. 14 (= fr. 306i). Many, Gentili foremost among them, have pointed to this substantial, albeit highly lacunose, text as proof that Heraclitus' allegorical claims were justified and widely held.[26] It seems clear that these lines contain portions of an allegorical commentary on a maritime poem of Alcaeus.[27] The specific import of the comments is quite challenging to construe, but they appear to put forward an allegorical interpretation of a sexual, rather than martial or political, nature. The commentary does not, in other words, support Heraclitus' specific claim that Alcaeus constantly described his political situation at Mytilene through maritime allegories. Rather it presents another type of allegorical approach, with similarities to, but also important differences from, that of Heraclitus. Particularly when viewed in light of the papyrus's second-century AD date, the commentary can be seen to offer support for Heraclitus'

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[23] Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 5.3.   [24] Bowra (1940) 127.
[25] West (1974) 128 cites this passage in support of connecting fr. 105 to fr. 106, but does not challenge the claim that the poem is allegorical.
[26] Gentili (1988) 209–12.   [27] Porro (1994) 104.

position in only the most general sense, as evidence of other allegorical criticism of Alcaeus in the first and second centuries AD.[28] Nor is it a surprise to find such interest in allegory amongst ancient critics, given the popularity of the allegorical approach, particularly during the period in which both Heraclitus and the anonymous commentator of *P.Oxy.* 2307 were active.[29] This approach was applied to poetry of all sorts,[30] above all to the epics of Homer, the allegorical interpretation of which, lest we forget, was the main object of the work in which Heraclitus makes his brief, but pivotal, reference to the incessant allegorizing of Alcaeus.

Situating Heraclitus within this broader framework of ancient critical approaches exposes the dangers of relying too heavily on the voice of a single ancient critic. Claims of allegorical meaning were not universally accepted, nor did all allegorical readers find the same meanings hidden in their texts; some, like Heraclitus, were attuned to political resonances, while others were drawn to the personal and sexual symbolism of a text, or to yet other themes, philosophical and religious. These invaluable ancient testimonials cannot provide us with a definitive answer regarding the allegorical character of Alcaeus' poems. They are, rather, witnesses to the great diversity of interpretative strategies available in the ancient world. And, as with all questions of interpretation, each approach is determined by a mix of sociohistorical conditions and personal sensibilities. There is no doubt that Alcaeus was read allegorically in the ancient world, probably for many centuries before Heraclitus. This fact does not prove that Alcaeus' poems were allegories, only that they, like so many other ancient poems, could be fruitfully interpreted as such.

My aim in raising these doubts is neither to criticize allegory nor to question its relevance to poetry and poetics. I am interested, rather, to examine *why* allegorical reading, and in particular allegorical reading of the marine sphere, exerts such a hold on us at the moment. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many modern

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[28] The commentaries of frs 305a (discussed later in this section) and 305b, which claims that the storm of fr. 208.1–9 refers to Myrsilos' political machinations, are similarly late examples of post-factum allegorical reading informed by interpretative practices that may not have been prevalent in sixth-century Mytilene. On the remarkably murky documentation of Myrsilos' career, and the possibility that no such historical person ever existed, see Dale (2011).

[29] Struck (2004) 142–61.

[30] Anacreon is also mentioned in *P.Oxy.* 2307. Allegorical commentary on Pindar and Aeschylus is discussed by Calvani Mariotti and Derenzani (1977) 160 n. 7 (*non vidi*).

critics were quite happy to reject Heraclitus' allegorical claims as unsuited to their purposes.[31] As Wilamowitz rather bluntly put it: without clear evidence from within the text itself, we should not suppose allegorical import 'nur auf der Autorität der antiken Ausleger'.[32] Why, then, do we find such value in the assertions of an ancient critic now?[33]

As a mode of textual interpretation, allegory poses particular challenges. Allegory is often referred to as 'extended metaphor', and in some respects the identification is apt. Like metaphor, allegory uses one set of words or images to represent another, creating meaning that does not correspond to the literal or surface sense of the language. But in other respects the shorthand of 'extended metaphor' can be badly misleading, since it obscures the stark differences between the interpretative dynamics that these two forms of figurative composition activate.[34] Metaphor, and likewise simile, work at the level of the word or phrase and signal their symbolic status through a disruption to the surface of a text. Allegory, by contrast, works at the level of the sentence and does not overtly indicate its figurative status. As Andrew Laird describes it, 'metaphor and other tropes must be essentially distinct from allegory (*pace* Quintilian) because they are features of diction which are part of the internal fabric of a text. They are, as it were, scientifically detectable.'[35] In other words, metaphor can be identified by all, even if the import of any given figure may remain the subject of debate. In allegory, by contrast, the impetus to draw a figurative connection is left entirely to the discretion of the individual.

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[31] For a survey of positions, see Nicosia (1977) 153, also Page (1955) 82 n. 2.

[32] Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1914) 234. Although he took a quite different position, Page (1955) 184 too asserts that 'the question of whether this poem was allegorical is not to be answered by the mere authority of the source (i.e. Heraclitus). Prejudice may beget error when a critic makes it his business to hunt for allegories.'

[33] On the perils of appealing to ancient critics for interpretative guidance, see Feeney (2006).

[34] It is telling that Gentili (1988) 198 adopts the model of 'extended metaphor'. This definition is most famously associated with Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* 8.6.44), whom Gentili himself cites, but it also underpins the approach of Heraclitus. As Struck (2004) 154–5 makes clear, even amongst the ancients, Heraclitus' 'rhetorical' approach was an exception to the general tendency to treat allegory in a much vaguer and more generalized fashion.

[35] Laird (2003) 174.

In considering the question of how allegory makes itself known, it is helpful to consider the stark 'ship-of-state' poem most often attributed to Theognis, which concludes with a declaration that the speaker has been communicating in riddles.[36] ταῦτά μοι ᾐνίχθω κεκρυμμένα τοῖς ἀγαθοῖσι (681), the poet asserts, inviting his audience to search for hidden meanings in the image of the foundering ship that he has just so vividly described. Alcaeus, by contrast, never suggests that his ships should be scrutinized for *hyponoia*, at least in the lines that remain to us. As Gauthier Liberman comments in his recent discussion of fr. 208a, 'on affirme souvent que le vaisseau représente ici, commes dans les fr. 6 et 73, la πόλις, mais cela est en réalité très douteux'.[37] One possible exception is found in fr. 305a, which preserves fragments of a commentary dating to the second century AD.[38] The papyrus contains only one line of Alcaeus' poem, ὡς ἄλος ἐ<κ> πολίας ἀρυτήμεν[οι, surrounded by substantial paraphrase indicating a martial theme, ὡς ἐκ θαλάσσης ἀντλο[ῦ]ντες ἀνέκλειπτον πόλε[μο]ν ἔξετε.[39] Although there is no decisive proof that the reference to war is indeed original to Alcaeus' poem, it is nevertheless noteworthy that the figurative status of the sea is clearly marked by the use of a comparative adverb in both Alcaeus' verses and the gloss (ὡς ἄλος 10, ὡς ἐκ θαλάσσης 11–12). Moreover, the reference to the marine sphere is made in the briefest and most generic terms,[40] with no suggestion of a ship or sailors, or of any of the highly detailed description that characterizes Alcaeus' maritime poems, a subject to which I will return in detail in the next section. This explicit figurative connection between the sea and (what seem to be) martial affairs provides a valuable contrast to the vivid reality of Alcaeus' more expanded

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[36] Page (1955) 188 notes the stark difference in tone between the two poets. By contrast with Alcaeus, in Theognis' verse 'the [maritime] imagery is never for a moment allowed to obscure the truth' of the political import. On the authorship of these verses, see West (1974) 40–64, Bowie (1997).

[37] Liberman (1999) 86.

[38] For analysis of the fragment, see Porro (1994) 33–8, 46–9, and more recently Lentini (1999), and Cazzato (2016) 186.

[39] I quote here the text as printed in Voigt. Lentini (1999) makes a strong case against supplementing the participle ἀρυτήμεν[, so Liberman (1999).

[40] Compare ἁλὸς πολιῆς *Il.* 1.350, 1.359, 12.284, 13.682, 14.31, 21.59, 21.374; πολιῆς ἁλός *Il.* 13.352, 15.691 19. 267 *Od.* 2.261, 4.405, 23. 236 (also πολιῆς (…) θαλάσσης *Il.* 4.248, *Od.* 11.75, 22.385). Alcaeus employs the pairing again at fr. 117b.26–7 in a similarly brief comparison (πόρναι δ' ὅ κέ τις δίδ[ωι | ἴ]σα κἀ[ς] πολίας κῦμ' ἄλ[ο]ς ἐϲβ[ά]λην) and it is regularly found in later poets as well.

seafaring scenes and, more pointedly, stands as a reminder of the absence of reliable markers linking the sea and land elsewhere.

Since the fragments of Alcaeus generally classed under the heading 'ship of state' do not readily suggest that they contain any hidden meaning, that the ships and waves and sailors that they depict are meant to represent anything other than ships and waves and sailors, the decision to understand these poems allegorically falls entirely to the personal judgement of the interpreter. While one person will hear the hidden meaning with perfect clarity, another may see no warrant for figurative interpretation. Laird, again, describes the situation aptly: 'the detection of allegory is really a subjective issue, or to be more accurate, a question of ideology'.[41] Ancient critics had their own varied, and often idiosyncratic, reasons for adopting allegory as a means of textual interpretation.[42] But whatever their aims, they were quite clearly distinct from our own. Which leads us to ask: what 'ideology', to use Laird's term, guides our current allegorical reading of Alcaeus?

It is not hard to locate the motivation behind our contemporary fascination with the allegorical Alcaeus. As I have already made clear, I believe that the approach is fundamentally linked to our scholarly preoccupation with performance context. The work of Bruno Gentili is emblematic of this connection, and I will turn to his important contribution in a moment. But even before our performative turn was in full swing, the deep affinities between modern allegorical interpretation and questions of performance are readily apparent. In his 1955 study of Sappho and Alcaeus, Denys Page argued strongly for an allegorical reading of Alcaeus' maritime poems, classing frs 6, 208a, 73, and 249 as 'political poems', under the subheading 'Ship-of-State'.[43] Page was uncommonly sensitive to the challenge of proving his allegorical assertions and rejected much of the evidence that would be marshalled by other modern scholars.[44] Yet he found himself unable to reconcile the literal content of Alcaeus' poems with his conception of how the verses were sung. Noting the vivid present tense used in fr. 6, Page declared it impossible to identify a performance context that could accommodate a literal reading of the poem. 'If then it is a real storm, Alcaeus must have recited his poem either during it or after it, and one of the two inferences must be made, the first absurd, the second unbelievable.'[45] So far, the

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[41] Laird (2003) 153.　　[42] Struck (2004).　　[43] Page (1955) 179–97.

[44] Page (1955) 188–9.　　[45] Page (1955) 185.

resistance to a maritime performance context is not unlike that of Bowie in his discussion of Archilochus fr. 4. But Page then conflates performance context and content, a distinction that, as we have seen, tends to blur when set along the boundary between land and sea. The perceived impossibility of shipboard performance, or of so vivid a re-creation of the marine circumstances on land, leads Page to the conclusion that the poem is not, in fact, about a ship at all. For Page, allegory solves a problem of performance, quite literally bringing the songs back onto solid ground. But in doing so, the sea is abandoned almost entirely.

The influence of performance is even more apparent when one examines the allegorical Alcaeus of Gentili. Alongside Wolfgang Rösler, whose influential Jaussian study of Alcaeus appeared in 1980,[46] Gentili argued that Alcaeus' songs had been composed for performance within a very specific context: the sympotic gatherings of the closely knit *hetaireia*, in which Alcaeus' poetic and political affairs were one and the same. It was only with respect to the unique circumstances of this original performance, Gentili contended, that his poems could be properly interpreted.[47] Declaring the purpose of Alcaeus' *hetairia* to be principally political in nature, both Gentili and Rösler identified allegory as the most effective tool in the poet's repertoire. Only an allegorical interpretation could accurately reflect the strong political messages concealed in his verses and recover their true relationship to the social upheaval taking place in Mytilene at the time that they were composed. Strikingly, four allegorical interpretations (frs 73, 6, 208a, and 140) inaugurate the second part of Rösler's study, in which he set out to demonstrate the validity of historical *Rezeptionsästhetik*.[48] They were, as Rösler saw it, the strongest evidence in support of the links between political context and content for which he was arguing.

To make the connections between Alcaeus' maritime poems and the political turmoil of sixth-century Mytilene required a bit of

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[46] Rösler (1980). On Jauss and reception, see Holub (1984).

[47] Gentili (1988) 197–215. Recently Caciagli (2011) has presented a far more expansive picture of performance contexts for Alcaeus' and Sappho's work on Lesbos. He argues that 'Il pubblico presupposto dall'esecuzione originaria concepita dal poeta [...] poteva variare enormemente secondo i [diversi] contesti' (12). Nevertheless, Alcaeus' ships are still treated as political allegories and the insights of Heraclitus are said to 'spieg[are] determinate espressioni chiarendone la referenza contestuale' (15, see also 30–1; 236–7).

[48] Rösler (1980) 115–58.

detective work. But unlike Page, Rösler and Gentili believed that certain terms and gestures constituted definitive proof of the poems' political import. Deemed especially potent in this regard was the use of the first person plural, which was seen to reflect the tight bonds and communitarian spirit of the *hetairia*.[49] The cryptic nature of the encoded messages only added to the allure. If Alcaeus consciously crafted his songs for a singular performance context—before the small audience of like-minded Mytilenian aristocrats with whom he hoped to thwart the political aspirations of a string of aspiring despots and save his beloved city from the harsh grasp of tyranny—a twentieth-century interpreter would naturally need to attune himself to those aspects of the text that now sounded least obvious. Allegorical interpretation met these needs perfectly. By looking past the superficial meaning of the poems, with their focus on ships and storms, the critic was able to demonstrate his commitment to the pursuit of Alcaeus' original performance context. Indeed, one can hardly imagine a better way to make good on the promise to reveal the intimate conversations of Alcaeus' coterie and to place scholars amongst their number as listeners able to hear the hidden code. Never mind that the secret allegorical codes could be understood only by means of texts born of vastly divergent political, social, and historical circumstances,[50] Gentili was unequivocal in his assessment: the hidden meaning of Alcaeus' songs could be unlocked only by means of what he called the 'symbolic key' of allegory.[51]

But what does it matter if we now read a handful of extremely fragmentary poems from a relatively neglected sixth-century Lesbian poet allegorically? Rösler's and Gentili's focus on the hyper-localized context of Alcaeus' Mytilenian *hetairia* can at times distract from the far more powerful, and farther-reaching, claim being made for the importance of allegory. This twofold aspiration is particularly pointed in the case of Gentili, whose allegorical analysis of Alcaeus forms part of his most ambitious study of archaic poetry, *Poesia e pubblico nella Grecia antica*, published in Italy in 1984 and in an English translation by Thomas Cole, as *Poetry and its Public in Ancient Greece*, four years later.[52] Although his was neither the first,

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[49] Rösler (1980) 115, 129, 138–41, Gentili (1988) 201–4.

[50] See esp. the arguments of Gentili (1988) 199–208.

[51] Gentili (1988) 199.

[52] Gentili (1984), Gentili (1988).

nor the most sophisticated, account of what we have come to call the 'song culture' of archaic Greece, Gentili described the basic assumptions and parameters of the performance-guided approach in such a clear and decisive fashion that his work has gone on to serve as the cornerstone for any number of subsequent studies in nearly every area of Classics. Our thinking about performance may have evolved a great deal in the three decades since Gentili's volume was first published, yet the fundamental premise of his work—that an interest in the oral performance of archaic Greek lyric poetry entails the study of its occasional and hyper-localized features—is a view that is still widely, if by no means universally, accepted, even by those who expand their compass to questions of lyric *reperformance*. And at the very heart of the position that Gentili staked out in *Poesia e pubblico* are Alcaeus' allegories.

Gentili's chapter on the 'The Ship of State' is found towards the tail end of the work, yet the relative marginality of its position should not obscure its signal importance.[53] The hidden symbolism of Alcaeus' ships serves as a critical model for Gentili, who believes that the allegorical approach developed in his readings of Alcaeus must be exported to all interpretative scenarios. The allegory of the 'ship of state' is crucial to how Gentili understands the study of *all* Greek poetry in the light of its performative nature. As he explains in his chapter on 'Modes and Forms of Communication', in many respects the theoretical heart of the book, oral poetry is grounded in 'a mental attitude focused on performance', a disposition that seeks above all to establish

an emotional rapport between speaker and audience. Hence the frequent use of metaphors, images, and similes that in particular social contexts were able to take on connotations relevant only to the individual or collective aspects of the life of a single small community—an esoteric coterie language, so to speak, *evident above all in the allegories of Alcaeus*.[54]

Just as the hidden politics of Mytilene serve as the 'symbolic key' to Alcaeus' poems, the allegorical interpretation of Alcaeus is itself, in turn, a symbolic key to archaic Greek lyric at large. Reading archaic poetry in terms of its performance context requires the critic to decode the secret language that would have been heard by its original

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[53] See the sensitive appraisal of Bernardini (2015) 35–41.
[54] Gentili (1988) 42, italics mine.

audience, to detect the meanings hidden beneath the surfaces of our texts. Thus for Gentili, allegory becomes a vital interpretative tool, a means by which to bridge the apparent gap between the content of a poem and its performative context.

It hardly needs stating that Gentili's interest in allegory's ability to excavate a now lost contextual frame for our ancient texts did not emerge in a vacuum. His claims connect with a much larger trend towards broadly contextualized readings that can be grouped under the heading of 'New Historicism', which, in the study of archaic Greek poetry (and many other ancient texts) is more or less synonymous with the analysis of performance context. Without the abundant archives that fuelled New Historicist approaches in other fields, Classicists turn to allegory as the means to recover the resonances that accompanied these poems in their original performance. This interpretative disposition is astutely described by Victoria Wohl in her recent book, *Euripides and the Politics of Form*, when she explains that a properly contextualized understanding of Greek tragedy requires one to recognize that all tragedy is, at base, allegorical. 'This allegorical nature', she explains,

is the grounding premise of historicizing approaches to the genre. While the hunt for direct and specific historical references has largely gone out of style, virtually all historicist (including New Historicist) readings are predicated on the same allegorical logic and the assumption that tragedy is 'speaking otherwise' through the medium of its mythic scenarios about the *oikêia kaka*, the issues and concerns, of fifth-century Athens.[55]

Particulars aside, Wohl's observations about our contemporary approach to tragedy could be applied with equal validity to archaic lyric. Allegory, whether explicit or, more often, not, has become the foundation on which our understanding of ancient poetry is based, and the 'real-life' objects towards which we believe these allegories point us are almost always of a sociopolitical nature. Whether in the analysis of Pindar's mythical digressions or in that of Alcman's Hagesichora and Agido, we want the narrative of archaic song to allegorize the context in which the song was performed. It is easy to forget that, while allegory is not the only means of locating meaning in a text, the scholar in search of allegory will, as Page warns, almost always find his object.[56]

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[55] Wohl (2015) 91.   [56] Page (1955) 184; and n. 32 of this chapter.

SEA LEGS

Having argued that an allegorical reading of Alcaeus is born of an ideology that also motivates our current scholarly interest in performance context, I should make clear that I have no desire to abandon questions of performance in the approach to ancient texts, nor do I want to challenge the validity of allegory as a mode of poetic interpretation. The poetry of ancient Greece emerged within what we have learned to call a 'song culture', a society abounding in formal and informal venues for oral performance, and while oral performance was certainly not the only means by which ancient poetry was transmitted and considered, the study of ancient song cannot be attempted without including it. Similarly, there is no question that Alcaeus' poems can be read allegorically to powerful effect, whether with the political bent of Rösler and Gentili, or with the more self-referential sympotic import promoted by Burnett.[57] But I do believe it is worth asking if something is lost in our eagerness to transform these maritime poems into symbolic representations of or commentaries on events on land. And if so, whether a sensitivity to this oversight might help us to better formulate our approach to the complex relationship between poetry and performance.

If, through the critical intervention of Gentili, Alcaeus' maritime poems have become emblematic of a much broader methodological approach, one in which our desire to place poetry in its original performance context results in a default posture of allegorical interpretation, they are also an ideal platform from which to question, and perhaps walk back, some of the theoretical assumptions that inform our thinking about ancient poetry and performance. But it is not only because of Gentili that these maritime poems raise larger questions about the nature of (archaic Greek) performance. The marine sphere is possessed of a unique character within ancient Greek thought, as a place of uncertainty and unmooring, but also, as Marcel Detienne famously explored, of cunning arts, radical transformations, and unexpected truths.[58] By their very nature, Alcaeus' maritime poems ask us to contemplate modes of meaning other than the strict equivalences

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[57] Burnett (1983) 121–81. Similarly, Steiner (2012) 44 speaks of wine as the 'missing piece' in Archilochus fr. 13.

[58] Detienne (1996) 53–68. As noted, Slater too discusses the unsettling and mysterious resonances of the sea, though with reference more to Dionysus than to Athena.

that one finds on solid ground. They invite us to consider what it might mean to sing at sea, even if only in a figurative sense.

To reach this figurative landscape, I begin with an emphatically literal observation about the way in which the naval themes of Alcaeus' verses relate to the context of their performance in sixth-century Mytilene. Unlike the mythological tales of the tragic stage, the maritime perils that Alcaeus so vividly relates are drawn quite unambiguously from his contemporary world. Mytilene was an important port, strategically positioned in the far eastern waters of the Aegean, and its flourishing economy depended heavily on sea trade.[59] The reality of the sea, the force of its waves, and the terrible costs they could exact, would have been all too familiar to the many Mytileneans who had endured life aboard ship, as well as to those, certainly the vast majority of the population, whose lives were linked, whether closely or more tangentially, to maritime trade or other forms of sea-based livelihoods, such as fishing. The influence of seafaring in Mytilenean society is clearly borne out by Alcaeus' evocative prayer to the Dioscuri, who 'leap upon the tops of well-benched ships' ($\epsilon\mathring{v}\varsigma\delta[\mathring{v}\gamma]\omega\nu$ $\theta\rho\acute{\omega}\iota\sigma\kappa\upsilon\nu\tau[\epsilon\varsigma\,\,] \,\, \mathring{\alpha}\kappa\rho\alpha \,\, \nu\acute{\alpha}\omega\nu$, fr. 34.9) and in the work of his contemporary, Sappho, who depicts the effects of maritime affairs on those who are left behind, as in her evocative depiction of the anxiety felt by those attending the return of a ship in the recently discovered 'Brothers Poem'.[60] Life at Lesbos, it seems fair to say, was as much affected by *real* seafaring as it was by *real* politics.

To suggest that maritime affairs be taken seriously and treated as real and compelling features of sixth-century Lesbos, that is, of the context in which Alcaeus' and Sappho's poetry was composed and first performed, does not necessitate the adoption of any single interpretative strategy. The spectrum is quite wide, from biographical literalism to Marxist critique.[61] My own approach to Alcaeus'

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[59] Spencer (2000), who further argues that Mytilene far exceeded the other Lesbian cities in its commitment to maritime trade. Vetta (2002) notes that archaic Mytilene was itself an island, so that its inhabitants needed to make frequent sea crossings to access the Lesbian mainland, though he sees this as proof that Alcaeus' allegorical tendencies were even broader than generally presumed.

[60] Obbink (2014). For further discussion of this poem, see D'Alessio, this volume, pp. 54–6.

[61] With respect to the latter, it is noteworthy that our propensity towards allegorical reading has also had the unintended result of producing what Christopher Nealon, in discussing critics of late-twentieth-century poetry, has called a resistance to the economic materialities underpinning the fundamental 'relationship of poetry to

maritime poems falls in line with an approach that Stephen Best and Marcus Sharon have called 'surface reading', a mode of analysis that turns away from the type of symptomatic reading that construes elements readily apparent in a text as 'symbolic of something latent or concealed'.[62] Best and Sharon suggest that one can resist this type of treasure hunt by privileging those features that can be discerned at the surface of the text and by adopting an interpretative disposition that situates symbolic meaning along, rather than against, the grain of the text.[63] Expressing a similar desire to attend to the more self-evident aspects of the texts that he studies, Bruno Latour has also rejected the 'critical barbarity' of the hermeneutics of suspicion, calling for a 'second empiricism' that is sensitive to the way in which (interpretative) concerns are related to facts.[64]

It is hard to think of a more suitable candidate for surface reading, for the need to relate interpretation to the 'facts' of poetic content, than Alcaeus' maritime poems, verses brimming with detailed depictions of life on the sea, the value of which has been more or less discounted by scholars for the past three decades. And what emerges most notably from a renewed attention to the surface of Alcaeus' maritime poems is, perhaps surprisingly, a heightened sense of specificity. The pointed first-person descriptions of the elemental forces of wind and waves communicate the singularity of a unique occasion, albeit not of poetic performance but of the imagined experience at sea, something which, despite quite contrary goals, is often eroded by the allegorical approach of Gentili.[65]

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capital', preferring, instead to imply that 'poetic writing is *prima facie* political'. Nealon (2011) 19. Both frs 73 (πὰν φόρτι[ο]ν, 1) and 208a (τὰ δ' ἄχματ', 14) make mention of the merchandise that is the ultimate motivation for these perilous maritime voyages, a mark of distinction from the heroic seafaring that one associates with epic (though, of course, the line between heroic and merchant seamanship is already remarkably blurry in epic, a fact epitomized by Menelaus' successful transactions on his return from Troy: see *Od.* 3.312, 4.81–5).

[62] Best and Sharon (2009) 3.

[63] Surface reading represents a range of approaches, with no set methodology other than an interest in abandoning or 'evolving' away from the privileging of latent meaning over what is more clearly manifest in a given text; Best and Sharon (2009) 3. Within the field of Classics, Purves (2016) approaches the question of surface through the fascinating lens of touch and tactile sensation.

[64] Latour (2004) 230.

[65] Much of Gentili's argument rests on comparisons to unambiguously figurative descriptions of seafaring from Homer and, especially, Greek tragedy. Gentili (1988)

The particularity of the maritime scene can be readily discerned in the floundering ship of fr. 208a. Here a sailor cries out in distress from aboard his faltering ship. Buffeted by wind and wave, the vessel is succumbing to the sea.

> ἀσυν<ν>έτημμι τὼν ἀνέμων στάσιν,
> τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔνθεν κῦμα κυλίνδεται,
> τὸ δ' ἔνθεν, ἄμμες δ' ὂν τὸ μέσσον
>   νᾶϊ φορήμεθα σὺν μελαίναι   4
>
> χείμωνι μόχθεντες μεγάλωι μάλα·
> πὲρ μὲν γὰρ ἄντλος ἰστοπέδαν ἔχει,
> λαῖφος δὲ πὰν ζάδηλον ἤδη,
>   καὶ λάκιδες μέγαλαι κὰτ' αὖτο,]   8
>
> χάλαισι δ'ἄγκυραι, <τὰ δ'ὀήϊα>   ]
> [   ]
> . [. . .] . [   ]
>   τοι πόδες ἀμφότεροι μενο[   ]   12
>
> —
>
> ἐ<ν> βιμβλίδεσσι· τοῦτό με καὶ σ[άοι]
> μόνον· τὰ δ' ἄχματ' ἐκπεπ[.] . ἄχμενα
> . .]μεν . [.]ρηντ' ἔπερθα· τὼν[. . .] .
>   ]ενοις . [   ]   16
>
>   ]νεπαγ[
>]πανδ[
>   ]βολη[

I do not understand the direction of the winds, for a wave rolls now this way, now that, and in the middle we are borne along with the black ship suffering much in this great storm. The bilge water covers the masthold and the whole sail is in tatters with great rips throughout. The anchors are unstrung, the rudders ... both feet ... in the cords. This saves me alone, and the cargo ... above ...

Despite the danger the sailor faces, we find the poet relishing the practical particulars of life at sea. This attention to technical detail lends fr. 208a a sense of specificity very different from the political

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199–200. Gentili claims that the comparisons prove the deep contextualization of Alcaeus' poem and its roots in the political fortunes of his *hetairia*. But, far from lending specificity to Alcaeus' situation, they result in a homogenized picture, equating the meaning of a ship in Athens at the height of empire with that of sixth-century Lesbos. On the prominence of marine and nautical metaphors in Athens, especially following the battle of Salamis, see Goldhill (2007) 130, Dougherty (2014).

messages identified by Gentili. After the opening lines establish the circumstances of the storm, the description is firmly trained on the components of the ship; the masthold, the sail, the anchors, the rudders, the cords. In her discussion of the poem, Anne Pippin Burnett notes Hermann Fränkel's description of the verses as *stoffhungrig*, 'as if', she explains, 'the singer's chief pleasure lay in his knowing use of nautical terms'.[66] The catalogue of specialized terminology is marshalled without pause, as relentless as the storm waves buffeting the ship. To many modern ears (certainly to mine), the idioms are challenging. As we found with Archilochus' drunken sailor, the general sense can be grasped, but their specific import is often difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend.[67] Alcaeus sings of rudders and cords with an intimate affection that is markedly alien to those of us who go through life largely unaware of the maritime networks that make our quotidian existence possible.[68] The inscrutability of these technical descriptions suggests a hidden meaning not unlike a secret code, and perhaps we can hear in them some of the motivation for our allegorical exploits. We cannot know if these seafaring terms would have been understood by Alcaeus' first audiences in Mytilene, or for those who heard his verses reperformed years or centuries later across the Greek Mediterranean. Whether intelligible or not, the technical vocabulary, used in such a dense and insistently practical manner, produces a kind of maritime aesthetics, a poetic beauty that reflects the beauty of seafaring itself.[69]

   In this celebration of what is particular and specific in the marine sphere, Alcaeus' nautical poetics are deeply informed by the spirit, if not always the language, of Homer's epics, poems which themselves dwell with delight on the technical minutiae of seafaring, epitomized by the detailed description of Odysseus' raft at *Odyssey* 5.[70] Like Homer, Alcaeus treats ships as objects of beauty and the sea in which they sail as a place of great danger.[71] The maritime aesthetics of fr. 208a do not allow our gaze to linger on the perfection of a well-built ship, but rather invite us to watch as it is destroyed piece by piece; water flowing up from the bilge, sails shredded by the winds, anchors and rudders and ropes slack and useless. The sailor's reliance on the maritime technology is made all the more evident as its protections are removed and his disorientation and despair, surrounded by wind and waves, no longer certain of the ship that has brought him out on the water, are boldly evoked; he is, quite literally, at sea.

   Alcaeus colours his maritime aesthetics through the occasional use of striking metaphors that bridge the gap between land and sea. These moments often invoke the world of terrestrial warfare or politics. But rather than identifying these 'intrusive' usages as markers of Alcaeus' allegorical disposition, as Gentili does,[72] it is possible to approach these moments from a different perspective, as examples of how Alcaeus enriches his depiction of the marine sphere through the use of language that reminds us of the stark contrast between land and sea. At times the effect can be quite subtle, as with the mention of στάσις at fr. 208a.1. The term has a well-established meteorological meaning that perfectly suits the context,[73] yet does not entirely erase the suggestion that the behaviour of the winds is somehow like that of men in the confusion and agitation of political revolt.[74] But the contrast here is as strong as, if not stronger than, the similarity, as the incomprehensible movements of the winds are not described with

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[66] Burnett (1988) 154; Fränkel (1968) 52. Bernardini (2015) 45 notes a similar celebration of technical terminology in Alcaeus' description of weaponry elsewhere in his corpus, a reflection, she argues, of his deep concern with the realities of martial experience.

[67] One notes the relative obscurity of the obviously technical terms, such as ἰστοπέδαν, ὀήϊα (= οἴαξ printed by Voigt but not Liberman), βιμβλίδεσσι (= βιβλίς), ἄχματ' (= ἄγμα, glossed as τὰ ἀγώγια) as well as of πόδες, which may refer to the sailor's feet or 'the two lower corners of the sail, or the ropes fastened thereto, by which the sails are tightened or slackened' but also the nautical sheets, rudder, or steering-paddle, according to LSJ.

[68] On the invisibility of contemporary maritime life, see George (2014).

[69] In a more general spirit, Hutchinson (2001) 192 argues for the need to consider 'aesthetic pleasure' as a goal of Alcaeus' poetry.

[70] For discussion of the *Odyssey*'s maritime poetics, see Dougherty (2001).

[71] On the danger of the sea, see the discussion of Lesky (1947) 188–214 and Heirman (2012) 146–72 (152–7 on Alcaeus).

[72] The claim that these moments of 'semantic boldness can only be accepted by a community that knows the referential code' ignores the many ways that these metaphors have been appreciated and interpreted over the centuries; Gentili (1988) 205.

[73] Kassel (1973) 102–4 and Burzacchini and Degani (1977) 209. Gentili (1988) 297 n. 31 dismissed the usage, for this reason, as an example of Alcaeus' allegorical thinking. Rösler (1980) 137 was not so circumspect.

[74] A similar effect is found in the phrase ἄμμες δ' ὄν τὸ μέσσον fr. 208a.3, which may suggest the Lesbian temple site referred to as the *Messon*, on which see Robert (1960), Nagy (1993), Caciagli (2010). It is also possible that such ambiguity is at play in the mention of μοναρχίαν at fr. 6.27 (a somewhat different non-allegorical suggestion is put forth by Slater (1976) 169–70), but the context and import of this highly suggestive word remain obscure (see also n. 81).

reference to any divine will or guiding intention. Indeed, throughout his maritime poems, Alcaeus refrains from any explanation of the pitiless storms that buffet his sailors. The elements are antagonists entirely unlike those one meets on land, entirely alien to the world of men. Elsewhere Alcaeus more strikingly juxtaposes marine and terrestrial worlds, as with the novel image of manning a ship as if fighting atop battlements (fr. 6.7-8 φαρξώμεθ' ὢς ὢκιστα[| ἐς δ' ἔχυρον λίμενα δρό[μωμεν).[75] Here Alcaeus uses an obvious terrestrial metaphor to underscore the unfamiliarity of life at sea. Battlements that one mounts on land are stationary objects, the most firmly founded defences of a city that holds fast to its seat when attacked. But the sailors climb the rigging not to defend their ancestral land but to put themselves in motion, to race through the sea in search of safe harbour. They are not being attacked by enemies from afar, but by the very water, the 'ground' on which their ship is perched. Alcaeus' seascapes are wild and alien places that must, at times, be translated into the recognizable language of terrestrial life in order to be properly comprehended. His metaphorical bridges between the terrestrial and marine spheres demonstrate a virtuosic creativity in evoking the terror of the sea, using striking language to render the subject of his verses at once more and less familiar.

Alcaeus' maritime poems are almost exclusively marine affairs, but he does speak explicitly about land at two points, once in fr. 6 and again in fr. 249.[76] In both instances, the mention serves to draw a contrast between terrestrial behaviour and that which is required at sea. The terms are most clearly set out in fr. 249, where Alcaeus defines the difference between land and sea in terms of the temporality of one's thought. The poem, which is extremely fragmentary, describes a ship (νᾶα φ[ερ]έσδυγον, 3) in undetermined, though

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[75] Gentili (1988) 205.

[76] Critics have generally understood the latter portion of fr. 73, beginning with νόστου λελάθων (8), to mark a shift to a terrestrial setting in which the narrator enjoys drink and song with his companion, Bycchis. Rösler (1980) 116, Burnett (1983) 140–1, Liberman (1999) 51–2. Without wishing to argue against this interpretation, I would note that the circumstances suggested in such a reconstruction are nowhere made explicit, but must be inferred solely from the sense of relaxation from care implied by λελάθων (8) and pleasure of σύν τ' ὔμμι τέρπ[(9). There is no doubt that these terms are well suited to a sympotic context, but I believe it imprudent to declare this the only possible import of the lines, particularly in the light of the new reading νόστου (*P.Oxy.* xxi 2307 fr. 16) which would fit neatly with a continued nautical theme.

probably perilous (κατέχην ἀήταις, 5), conditions,[77] the thought of which leads to a gnomic meditation on seafaring more generally.

$$ἐ]κ γᾶς χρῆ προΐδην πλό[ον$$
$$αἰ τις δύνατα]ι καὶ π[αλ]άμαν ἔ[χ]η,$$
$$ἐπεὶ δέ κ' ἐν π]όν[τωι γ]ένηται$$
$$τῶι παρέοντι †τρέχειν† ἀνά]γκα.$$

from land, it is necessary to take thought for sailing, if one is able and has the means, but when one is upon the sea, necessity [runs?] to the present.

The text requires some supplementation and is highly uncertain at points, but the general sense of the verses is evident in the clear contrast between the leisure to plan ahead that is afforded on dry land (ἐ]κ γᾶς χρῆ προΐδην) and the need to respond to immediate demands (τῶι παρέοντι) when at sea.[78] Mention of a stratagem (μ]αχάνα, 10) in the lacunose line that follows, supports an interpretation that would fit these verses to the larger discourse of maritime cunning explored so deftly by Detienne.[79] The dangers of the sea are here viewed from a slightly different angle from that which we found in fr. 208a, one which highlights the sea as a place in which a man's mental faculties are most hardily tested. Without the benefit of contemplation, one's ability to act decisively in the moment, to show one's true courage and cunning, is all that matters.

A similar contrast between land and sea is explored in fr. 6, where sailors on yet another struggling vessel are forced to contemplate their fate and prove their valour. The poem begins with a description of the stormy sea, comparable to that at the beginning of fr. 208a, but with a greater emphasis on the suffering of the sailor and his comrades (παρέξει δ' ἄ[μμι πόνον π]όλυν | ἄντλην, 2–3). The prominent role given to the ship's human occupants is further developed when the speaker addresses his comrades, rousing them to action in the hope of saving both their ship and their lives (7–8). Assaulted by the natural elements, it is not the integrity of the ship (as in fr. 208a), but the character of the sailors that is being tested. In his call to action,

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[77] It is unclear whether the reading χ[ό]ρον at line 2 refers to the terrestrial sphere, or is used metaphorically, as it might be of dolphins or sea-birds.

[78] Liberman (1999) 91 takes the lines somewhat differently, though not incompatibly, as a reflection on the futility of planning ahead.

[79] Detienne (1996) 53–68.

the sailor appeals to his fellow men not to bring shame on their noble ancestors:

> καὶ μή τιν' ὄκνος μόλθ[ακος
> λάβη· πρόδηλον γάρ· μεγ[
> μνάσθητε τῶν πάροιθε ν[
>   νῦν τις ἄνηρ δόκιμος γε[νέσθω   12
>
>   ——
> καὶ μὴ καταισχύνωμεν[
> ἔσλοις τόκηας γᾶς ὔπα κε[ιμένοις
> οἴ] τᾶνδ[
>   τὰν πό[λιν   16

and let soft fear not seize anyone. For it is manifest: a great . . . remember the [?] of the past, and let each man now earn his esteem and let us not dishonour our noble parents who lie under the earth. . . . this . . . the city . . .

There is nothing unusual in calling on young men to uphold the honour of those who have preceded them,[80] but in Alcaeus' formulation it also introduces a clear contrast between the terrestrial realm, in the form of the land under which the sailors' ancestors lie buried (γᾶς ὔπα), and the marine sphere, in which the sailors must now prove their worth.[81] As we saw with fr. 249, the distinction is a temporal one. The actions of the sailors' parents lie in the past; they have already shown their nobility and, having died, exist in a state of permanent honour. The suffering sailors, by contrast, have yet to prove themselves. They face their trial now, their struggles lie before them (so the deictic emphasis of the opening τόδ᾽ αὖ]τε (1), the future tense of παρέξει (2), and the urgency of ὡς ὤκιστα (7)).[82] When we consider that, by both poetic and historical conventions, those who die at sea are denied a proper burial,[83] the distinction between the two

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[80] See, e.g., the discussion of Crotty (1994) 24–41.

[81] Although the lacunose text makes the context all but impossible to determine with any precision, it appears that the mention of μοναρχίαν (27), so central to many political allegorical readings of the poem, relates to this later, explicitly terrestrial section. If so, there would be no difficulty in understanding the term to refer quite literally to conditions adhering within the *polis* in contrast to those (now) experienced by the sailors at sea. For a different view, see Hutchinson, this volume, pp. 126–7.

[82] Cazzato (2016) 185 notes the 'heightened drama' and 'here and now-ness' of Alcaeus' maritime poems.

[83] Archilochus fr. 13 explores this question from the other perspective, contemplating those lost at sea from his safe position on land; see the excellent discussion of Steiner (2012).

realms is rendered more substantive. As long as they remain out at sea, the sailors are divorced, perhaps permanently, from the land of their ancestors and removed from the localized context in which familiar traditions and assumptions obtain. They must be reminded of the past (μνάσθητε τῶν πάροιθε) because it is not present with them. Facing disaster on the open sea, the sailors find themselves out of context.

I have so far advocated a reading of Alcaeus' maritime poems that attends primarily to their surface. I have argued that we should take seriously the maritime content of the poems, both as reflecting an important facet of 'real life' in sixth-century Mytilene and as comprising a maritime aesthetics that treats ships and seamanship as an object of beauty. In doing so I have suggested that we endeavour, just like Alcaeus' struggling sailors, to stay above the waters and hold fast to the unique occasions created within the imaginary world of his poems rather than to draw allegorical equivalences with extra-poetic context. But the sea is deep, and it can be agreeable to dive beneath the waves when one is not in mortal danger, and it is in this somewhat contrasting spirit of depth-plumbing that I would like now to suggest that the marine world that Alcaeus creates in these poems can serve as a model for us, as modern interpreters of archaic song, of an alternative type of performance occasion, and hence of a different type of relationship between a poem's context and its content.

This alternative model hinges on the sense of immediacy that comes through most clearly in the contrast between land and sea found in frs 6 and 249. When classicists think about performance, we tend to focus, above all, on the singularity of the performative occasion. Lured by the prospect of locating the irrecoverable vitality of performance, we seek to recreate the past by adopting the strategies of historians; we fill in as much of the context as we can, hoping perhaps that if we supply enough of the surrounding material, the contours of an absent performance will emerge. But the sea resists the idea of such historical contextualization. Its pathless expanses do not remain constant from one moment to the next. And while I do not wish to argue, in the face of Bowie's cutting criticisms, that Alcaeus' songs were performed at sea, there can be no doubt that the model of immediacy and occasion that they put forward is one that spurns the comparatively static and historicized sphere of terrestrial life.

It is not difficult to imagine the appeal of these maritime poems, which through the immediacy of the poetic *jeu d'esprit* figuratively

transport their audience, sympotic or otherwise, to the high seas, as if, as Cazzato observes, the events aboard ship 'were happening to the "I" and his companions at the time of speaking'.[84] But the world to which these poems remove their listeners is emphatically unlike that of the leisurely symposium. The sea is a world of danger and toil, of uncertainty and rootlessness, a world in which beauty is born of the utility of masts and ropes, and decisions must be made without reflection. The repose of the symposium invites contemplation and second thoughts, the very kind of reflection that leads to allegory. As Heraclitus himself asks of Alcaeus' ships: who would not imme- diately believe (τίς οὐκ ἂν εὐθύς . . . νομίσειε) that they were truly about a storm at sea (5.5). It is only upon reflection that their allegorical meaning can be gleaned. But this is not the type of thinking that Alcaeus' maritime aesthetics invites. As the inversion of the sympotic ideal, the sea presents us with a model for song that is born of, but not beholden to, its historical context. To insist on this rupture does not contradict Slater's image of a symposium at sea, but adds an important nuance. The vivid depiction of other worlds is not always an extension of or metaphor for the symposium. Songs *of* the symposium can negate their context, they can trouble their founda- tions just as an unexpected storm transforms the inviting sea into a place of terror, though, of course, such unsettling of foundations is itself deeply Dionysian in spirit.

Sea and land, seen in this way, are not historical places, but imagined settings, places in which we can situate song and explore its contours from our vantage of overwhelming ignorance. These are places that are made real in song, but do not exist, at least for us, outside the poetic imagination. It is in this light that I offer some concluding reflections on Barbara Kowalzig's excellent recent discus- sion of the maritime poetics of the dithyramb. Kowalzig has argued, with great insight and subtlety, that the nautical themes so frequently found in dithyramb are a marker of song that 'defies the musical definition of the place of origin'.[85] Like the seafaring themes that it embraces, dithyramb as a genre is not defined by 'a distinct geograph- ical location, but [by] maritime movement and communication'.[86] For Kowalzig, these claims reflect the historical reality of the 'homo- genized' world of the late sixth and early fifth centuries, when the

economic and social developments that resulted in a 'commodifica- tion' of song had eroded local identity. Viewed through a strictly historical lens, Alcaeus' Mytilenian songs would seem to represent the exact opposite of the panhellenism that Kowalzig describes. Yet, as we have seen, his songs too partake of the maritime discourse that replaces the clear boundaries of local origin with the unsettled and fluctuating world of the sea. They too reject the firm foundations of a 'distinct geographical location', preferring instead to incur the dangers, but also the thrilling immediacy, of racing across the seas. In fitting Alcaeus into Kowalzig's model of a maritime poetics, we can recognize that such non-local voices have always been a vital part of Greek song culture. The opposite of geographically distinct is not 'homogenized', but 'elsewhere' and 'otherwise'. If we seek to balance the contextual specificity of recent scholarship with an expanded notion of what archaic performance could do, Alcaeus' ships show us how song culture can embrace distance as much as proximity, isolation alongside community, uncertain waters as well as the secur- ity of home. We are not bound to narratives of decline from the ideal of an unspoiled and authentic world of local performance to one of displacement and corruption, commodification, and artifice. Maritime poetics is as authentic a feature of archaic song culture as are the symposia in which songs of the sea were so often sung. When we imagine ancient performance, the sea is always there, whether we float on its surface or penetrate its depths.

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[84] Cazzato (2016) 186.
[85] Kowalzig (2013) 57.   [86] Kowalzig (2013) 58.