

Ananios of Kleitor

*Poems & Fragments and Their Reception
from Antiquity to the Present*

Collected and translated by

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provided a greatly appreciated opportunity to research and eventually to ascertain,
to the fullest extent possible, the historical contingencies that guided the remarkable
trajectory of the literary career of Ananios of Kleitor.

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FOR ROCHELLE

“DAIMONIH,…”

INTRODUCTION

“How could she hear, her ears all stuffed with leaves?”

Daphne (1959)

Once upon a time in Constantinople, a courtier, wishing to pay a supreme compliment to the emperor’s mistress as she and her retinue passed by in public, softly spoke the first words, “οὐ νέμεσις (You can’t blame),” and nothing more from a passage in the *Iliad* (3.156–58). But it was sufficient for all within earshot to summon the rest of the speech to mind, since they were each and every one immediately familiar with the words that followed, “Trojans and well-greaved Achaians for suffering pain so long for such a woman,” and to register with pleasure their approval of the implicit comparison of the beauty of their contemporary royal paramour to that of Helen, “wondrously like the immortal goddesses to look upon.” Thirteen centuries separate the source of this story, the *Chronographia*, 6.61, of Michael Psellus (1018–c.1078), and Plato’s *Ion*, an elegant little dialogue about the rhapsodic Homeric recitations of the philosopher’s day and his dubious view of their ability to contribute anything of value to the understanding of human affairs. Yet there lingers in the Byzantine anecdote the slightest trace of Socrates’ famous analogy in the *Ion* of the elements of poetic performance to a magnetic field. While the comparison of the concatenation of divinely inspired poet, rhapsode, and audience to a series of rings held together by a magnetic-like force originally imparted to them by the Muse, is meant to illustrate Plato’s view of how the irrational may overpower and possess human nature, the story Michael Psellus tells reveals the cultural synergy of a distinctive literary sophistication that paraded through the cosmopolitan society in which he and his contemporaries lived. It is clearly a very late, if perhaps not the last, faint glimmer we have of a form and practice of literacy that is far removed from that of our own time and ken.

For us, continuity and connection with such poetry must be made through the sweat of our brows. To engage poems as old to us as Homer’s were to the Byzantines—indeed older and stranger to our eyes and ears—we must study long and hard. And we must produce leaders in the persons of scholars upon whose individual and collective efforts we are utterly dependent to recover the discourse of past generations from their rare and, at times, intractable physical embodiments, even in the smallest of pieces, artifacts that have fallen prey to the relentless pursuit

of random destructive conditions. As W. H. Auden has said as corrective to the patronizing reproach of William Butler Yeats in 'The Scholars', the same poem that inspired Anastas Krebs to emulate his private Catullus in the person of Ananios of Kleitor as he devoted himself to the retrieval of the ancient Greek's poems and fragments during the first half of the twentieth century: "Edit indeed; Thank God they do. If it had not been for scholars working themselves blind copying and collating manuscripts, how many poems would be available, including those of Catullus, and how many others full of lines that made no sense? . . . [O]nly the scholar with his unselfish courage to read the unreadable will retrieve the rare prize."¹

It was largely due to the efforts of such a scholar, the aforementioned Anastas Krebs of Munich's Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, that Ananios of Kleitor was liberated from one of literary history's most firmly sealed oubliettes. It was a release many years in the coming, which only commenced with the decision of a classicist trained primarily in ancient history and warfare, but who had also mastered a broad range of scholarly competencies, to unveil and ascertain the identity of a poet who had been victimized by a deplorable case of lingering academic negligence. Exactly why, other than for a passionate and abiding love of poetry, did Professor Krebs respond to a call that he pursue the recovery of the poems of a fourth-century BC Ananios, we do not now nor will probably ever know. Nor can we be certain of exactly when he realized that Ananios of Kleitor was a singular poet and person distinct from any other or the ranks of the anonymous, and that his poems had to be differentiated from those of the Ananios of earlier record, the sixth century BC iambographer, to whom a small handful of verses along with the credit for the invention of the ischiorrhogic, or broken-hipped, line have been attributed. We can be sure, however, that the publication in the early 1930s of the commentaries of the Anonymous Alexandrian and Theonaeus constituted a welcome, though by no means indispensable, confirmation of his already well-founded scholarly convictions concerning the poems and fragments of Ananios of Kleitor. It is due to his work, despite the impossibility of our appreciating its full measure, that we now enjoy this addition to the sum of our literary legacy from antiquity.²

This legacy comprises the complete extant works contained in this volume, and includes forty-one poetic items, most of them in a fragmentary state, drawn from papyrological sources, and some twenty-

five passages of varying length, transcribed from both papyri and medieval codices containing commentaries, conversations, and little disquisitions within whose frames of reference Ananios occupies a significant place. Other than the approximate birth date of 399 BC in the Arcadian city of Kleitor, reported by the Greek author Theonaeus as being proposed by Chamaemelon of Patrae in his lost work on Achaian and Arcadian poets, next to nothing is really known about the life of Ananios. Coming from Kleitor, he must have grown up speaking the dialect known as Arcado-Cyprian, but there is no trace of it in his writing, which shows the usual dialectal mixture of Greek poetry, with West Greek, or Doric, and Attic being the most salient. While we can trust his words to speak for his poetic gifts, we should hesitate, according to one of the imperatives of scholarly tradition, to take them literally concerning his life, though I personally have no serious problems believing the little that he tells us about himself.³ That this little seems mostly concerned with his amatory life, real or imagined, cannot be denied upon a first reading of his extant lines. But one look is not quite enough to fully take in Ananios, and the numerous other themes and topics that hover alluringly about his words often lead us into a suspended, never to be satisfied state of fascination with his evanescent *logopoieia*, like the delicious aromas wafting from the kitchens of restaurants we are destined to pass but never enter. Because I firmly believe that the reader of these poems and fragments should be allowed a completely free response to them, I will retreat from my inclination to suggest interpretive directives at this point, and end with two brief comments concerning the translation and the annotations I have furnished to assist and enrich what will be for most readers a first and only meeting with Ananios.

In translating these poems and fragments of Ananios of Kleitor into the English of our time, I have attempted to convey his sense as accurately and idiomatically as I can, being committed to making as meaningful a connection as possible with his intelligence, if not with his sensibility, which, belonging to a distant age, eludes our ability to experience it with a clarity that is free of the static interferences generated by the relentless idiosyncrasies of history's course and of our own natures.⁴ We hear something, but too many leaves have been turned and fallen between us to hear it all.⁵

Because of the extreme diversity, not to mention density, of the matter in this work, I have chosen to offer my annotations and remarks in the form of running commentaries upon each discrete item and its

contents in the hope of making it easier and more rewarding for the reader to consult them after, or even before, every encounter with their referents. That the reader may decide to honor the well-worn practice of skipping them altogether, I am quite aware (with apprehension) and prepared to accept (with disapprobation). But if that should be the case, I would strongly plead against overlooking the *Index Nominum*.

A Note on Spelling

Throughout my translations and commentaries I have followed the practice, with a few exceptions, of using English transliteration for the spelling of Greek names and words. For the sake of accuracy, however, I have allowed the Latinized spellings used by Barker and Sewtor-Lowden to stand. Thus, Ananios of Kleitor, Lousoi, etc. occur as Ananius of Clitor and Lusi, etc. in the texts of these earlier scholars. Like many others, I have abandoned a convention that would spell the name of the poet Alkaios as Alcaeus, and pronounce it, as I have heard individuals with degrees in classics, as “Al-say-us.” Similarly, like many who prefer English transliteration, I am disinclined to be obsessively consistent. If “Dionysos” for “Dionysus” is more accurate and unproblematic, “Bakchos” for “Bacchus” looks intolerably odd to me and I retain in its case, as well as in that of a few others, the older, traditional spelling. Alerted thus, the reader should have no difficulty adjusting to this practice.

Notes to the Introduction

- ¹ *The Dyer's Hand* (New York: Random House, 1962), p.43. Ironically, the same scholars he has defended against Yeats's “libel” and “nonsense” will one day retrieve the poems Auden decided to excise from the body of his work, the best known of which, ‘September 1, 1939’, he first deprived of its stanza containing the line, “We must love one another or die,” on the shaky grounds of his own excessive literalism that we must die anyway, and then, some years later, rejected in its entirety as trash. A poet's puny will to eradicate a poem that has found broad acceptance, as in the case as well of Paul Celan's repudiation of his ‘Todesfuge’ because it said things better left unsaid, cannot compete with the ruinous accidents visited by time and nature upon the markings with which we bear witness to our passing presence. And yet, as

we persist in our attempts to minimize the consequences and to control the damage of those accidents upon our precious record, we may also find our efforts assisted by unlooked-for strokes of good fortune. Consider the blind luck abetted by human industry that combined to recover and publish in 1974 the celebrated epode by Archilochos known as the Cologne Fragment, despite the stacked odds against a rescue from its languishing state for centuries as mummy-wrapping. If some person with a stronger practical than a poetic bent decided to put an edition of Archilochos' poems to such use rather than tossing it to an uncertain fate into the great dump heap of the Upper Nile, his decision to act thus proved essential to an outcome, albeit enormously belated, that, after all is said and done, was favorable to the cause of poetry. Under such circumstances—and we are—we must expect that attempts like those of Auden and Celan, not to mention that modern Alexandrian C.P. Cavafy, to consign certain of their poems to oblivion are doomed to failure, however much we might sympathize with their mid-twentieth century predicaments. The prison cell in which Melampous heard the worms say it was about to crumble was more secure.

- ² Our perception of Krebs' accomplishment, however, must come mainly through the lens of the only edition we have of Ananios, the one prepared by Sir Michael Sewtor-Lowden and published by William Grossmann of London in 1960. Our other source is the predominantly epistolary account of the events that lead up to the publication of this edition, an account I believe that deserves to be accepted as part of the poet's reception, despite the various troubling questions it raises and its wayward influence upon the trajectory of history. We might have had more secure access to the truth of these and perhaps many other matters had it not been for the disappearance, shortly after the publication of Sewtor-Lowden's edition, of virtually all of the original research materials, including transcriptions and annotations, that Krebs had compiled and collected, an inexplicable and lamentable incident that may have deprived us of some telling clues as to the provenance of this work even as it has most definitely removed from our view the incalculably valuable record of its construction. That Krebs rather impulsively passed these materials into the hands of the young English scholar Jonathan Barker, who in turn permitted them to be unceremoniously appropriated by Sewtor-Lowden, his Cambridge mentor, who then proceeded without compunction to base his edition on them, all bespeak states of academic desperation, albeit of discrepant kinds.
- ³ Paradoxically, it turns out that less, not even a birthplace, has been known for centuries about the sixth century iambic poet of the same name, than the precious little we now know of Ananios of Kleitor.
- ⁴ The Greek texts, of course, may be found in *The Poems and Fragments of Ananios of Clitor: An Authoritative Edition Compiled and Annotated, with an Introduction by Sir Michael Sewtor-Lowden* (London: William Grossmann Ltd.,

1960), and in the same scholar's 'Three Poems by Ananius of Clitor', *Review of Classical Studies*, 31 (January, 1953), 46–58).

- ⁵ In a marginal addition in the newly discovered manuscript sheets of the first draft of his 1822/1828 lecture 'The Varieties of Historical Writing', Hegel surely is not barking up the wrong tree when he avers that try as we may and must, we finally cannot understand the ancient Greeks any more than "the perceptions of a dog." See *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, 13–14; 18, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp.17–18.

ANANIOS

**The Poems & Fragments
of Ananios**

3. I will give as good [
by Aphrodite [
[
Either way [
and kiss behind the [
Again [
till it melts [
] turn this [
And again [
your mouth [
Love's mother [
[
On our knees [
breathing each [
]

4. She was so black
I called her crow.
She called me back
and called and called
and called. I stopped.

5. barren []
] the beach at Kos []
Phorkys []
] such bathing.

6. of Love's happy captives,
[]
[]
] write satisfaction
in my heart to []
] desires.

7. To you, Aphaia, I cry, I []
] Hear,
O, hear me now that []
] Can it be the invisible []

8. As the shepherd tilts his ear into the wind
to catch the lost lamb's bleating, so []

