



The Dialect of Alcman: History of the Language and the Text

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This PhD thesis deals with the dialect of Alcman, who composed songs for girls' choirs and other cultic events in 7th century BC Sparta. Primarily, it aims at a systematic and critical linguistic description, as no grammar of the peculiar dialect of Alcman exists yet, even though both the poet and the dialect are the subject of relatively intense interest. At the same time, the thesis offers an original suggestion as to how the dialect of Alcman relates to the dialect of other poets, and how the text was established in its existing form.

The dissertation is divided into three unequal parts: an introduction, a linguistic description, and a conclusion:

I. In the introductory chapter, 'Archaeology of the Text', I study partly how the poems of Alcman were performed in antiquity, and partly the degree to which they were known to the public outside Sparta. I argue that the poems were the object of constant re-performance until Hellenistic times, and that the individual songs were integrated parts of cults rather than dead pieces of literature which had hibernated since the Archaic age. The songs, I suggest, were composed not for a single occasion but for the sake of re-performance. It is true that a number of girls' names are mentioned, but I render it probable that these names are nothing but roles which new girls performed generation after generation for centuries. A written text, on the other hand, hardly existed in Archaic and Classical Sparta.

Outside Sparta, Alcman was scarcely known before Hellenistic times. Plato, who shows a great interest in Spartan culture and Spartan music in general, does not mention him at all, and the partheneions, which we now consider to be typical of Alcman, seem more or less unknown outside Sparta. The Attic drama does demonstrate some knowledge of Alcman, but it only relates to a limited selection of his poems; and indeed, the same couple of fragments are

referred to until the 3rd century BC, when knowledge of Alcman increases radically.

I maintain that the songs that stayed in Sparta and the ones that were exported were not only different as poems (some were more appealing for export than others), but also unique for linguistic reasons. At any rate, all the poems which were positively known before 300 BC are characterised by the absence of peculiar Laconian features, and by their relatively neutral Greek (like the choral lyrics of Pindar and the drama). I therefore conclude that the Laconian surface of the rest of his poetry is a consequence of the local performance, and thereby point to the last part of the book.

II. The linguistic description itself is divided into three parts: 'Phonetics', 'Morphology', and 'Phraseology'. In this summary I cannot, of course, give an account of all the points made in this section, but I will outline a few highlights:

'Phonetics'. The transmitted text shows both in the papyri and in the quotations several apparently vernacular features, e.g. retention of the long *a*. Open quality of the secondary long *e*, *o* (instead of spurious 'diphthongs'). Assibilation, or affrication, of the aspirated dental. The mysterious digraph *sd* instead of the zeta (which cannot be taken, I argue, as support for the hypothetical *sd* pronunciation of this phoneme). Doric accentuation of the text. However, besides these peculiar spellings, the regular ones do appear now and then, and must have been an integrated part of the ancient text of Alcman already. I suggest that the orthography indicates the actual pronunciation of the poems as they were recited in Hellenistic times with a certain influx of the *koina*. As to the syllabic structure, i.e. the contractions, the initial digamma, and the 3rd compensatory lengthening etc., the phonology of Alcman fits remarkably well into the general picture of archaic poetry.

'Morphology'. The transmitted text shows all the same variables that are familiar from the other archaic and classical poets, some of which are in accordance with the vernacular, others not. For instance, in the dative plural both *-ais*, *-ois* and *-aisi*, *-oisi*, both *-si* and *-essi*. In the preterite the augment is sometimes omitted, and in the athematic plural one meets both *-n* and *-san*. In the future tense the Doric *-se-* is only admitted when it is metrically indifferent, or the text sticks to the regular *-s-*. The short accusative plural, *-as*, appears not in Homer but in other archaic poets. The short thematic infinitive *-en* is restricted to the position before a consonant, an allophony (sandhi), which in my view reflects its oral execution. It is true that the article is more frequent than in Homer and

the other poets of choral lyric, but the fragments differ in this regard; this is probably the result of different style, which depends to some degree on the referentiality of the song.

'Phraseology'. Alcman shares a great number of word collocations or 'junctures' with Homer, but only seldom does he echo the Homeric passages in question consciously; rather, a common word potential is realised similarly when one expresses the same or similar ideas. This is obvious in the case of what I call conceptual complexes, where junctures are so frequent and interweave to such a degree that direct imitation is less than likely. The use of epithets is also normally original. Few of the individual words are peculiar to the Doric branch, and the majority of those words are cultic or names of plants and animals. The rest are either known also to Homer and the other poets, or else they are new formations with known elements, or else they are colloquial. The words which appear otherwise only in the Epic are mostly epithets, whereas the words which Alcman has in common with the other poets (but not with Homer) include several words describing the music or the cult.

III. The concluding part, 'Synthesis', starts with a division of the linguistic features described in part II into metrically exchangeable variables and metrically non-exchangeable variables, depending on whether the alternative linguistic forms have the same metric structure and can therefore be replaced without altering the composition. I conclude that the features described as belonging to the vernacular are primarily metrically exchangeable, and that the features which are not metrically exchangeable primarily are common to all poetry. I assign the exchangeable variables of the vernacular to an individual surface structure represented by the performance of the poem, and the common and metrically non-exchangeable variables to a general deep structure, which I identify as the competence of poetry.

The same difference between a surface of the vernacular and a common depth occurs in the verse inscriptions, which are our only direct testimony of the actual pronunciation of archaic poetry. It seems that the surface structure was not regulated until the classical age, when a literate culture was arising. In the Epic, the surface structure tends to develop vernacular features as far as this does not alter the metre, and if this is impossible it tends towards artificial and borrowed variables rather than archaic ones. The dialect of Alcman, too, shows similar continuous updating, and the variables of the poetic language are generally pronounced according to the vernacular. However, unlike the

Epic, lyric poetry is not principally resistant to metrically exchangeable archaic and borrowed features.

The poetic competence or deep structure constitutes a unity of potential word collocations and the metric exploitation of certain words and forms. The dactylic tetrameter, which Alcman is particularly fond of, is not epic per se, although it treats words more or less as Homer does. Even though different poetic productions do not show all the variables to the same degree, they appear as a coherent structure on the diachronic and stylistic level. The poetic language may trace its common origins back to Mycenaean (and ultimately Indo-European) times, but common innovations, in general of Eastern Greek origin, suggest that the unity was primarily synchronic.

I maintain to have substantiated that the dialect of Alcman is basically the same language as in the rest of archaic poetry, but that the transmitted form appears more like the Laconian vernacular because of local performance. The transmitted text is rather a Hellenistic transcript of that performance than a revised version of an archaic text.