

GREEK LYRICS

Translated by
Richmond Lattimore

SECOND EDITION
REVISED AND ENLARGED

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO & LONDON

SOLON OF ATHENS

Solon was the great social reformer, whose long life seems to have extended from about 630 to 550 or later. In either 594 or 592 he was made archon with extraordinary powers. He abolished all debts in which the person of the debtor was mortgaged and set free all who had been enslaved for debt, but he refused to redistribute property. His aim was to mitigate social injustice by moderate compromise before the underprivileged should become so exasperated that they would look for a dictator ("tyrant") to lead them. Many expected, and hoped in fact, that Solon would make himself dictator, but he refused to do this.

Solon also reformed the constitution. His fame rests mainly on his social and political work, but he was also a soldier, a merchant and traveler, a reflective thinker, the first identifiable "man of letters" in Athens, and a poet of considerable imagination and eloquence. Some of his poems (such as 2, 3, and 4) were composed in defense of his policies. Others are purely contemplative.

1. *Prayer to the Muses*

Shining daughters of Memory and Zeus on Olympus,

Muses, Piérides, listen to me in my prayers.

Grant me, at the hands of the blessed immortals, prosperity,
and always a high degree in the opinion of men.

So shall I bring pleasure to friends and pain to my enemies,
and my friends look on me in admiration, the others in fear.

My desire is to have riches; but win them unjustly

I will not, for retribution must then come my way.

When it is gods who are giving it, wealth befalls a man as some
solid plant, firm set from base of stock to the crest;

but cultivated with violence, it comes against nature,
dragged and obedient under direction of crimes,
all unwilling it follows, and ruin is there in a moment.

The beginning of disaster is not much, as when a fire
burns small in its first stages and ends in catastrophe. As fire's
course is, such is the course taken by human misdeeds.

But Zeus forever is watching the end, and strikes of a sudden,

GREEK LYRICS

as when a storm in spring abruptly scatters the clouds
and dredges up from the depth the open and heaving water
where waves roll, and sweeping on across the generous land,
leaves in wreckage fair work men have done, till it hits the headlong
sky, the gods' home, and the air is shining on every side
you look, and the blaze of the sun breaks out on the fertile acres
in all its splendor, and there are no more clouds to be seen.
Such is the punishment Zeus gives, he does not, like a mortal,
fall in a rage over each particular thing, and yet
it never escapes him all the way when a man has a sinful
spirit; and always, in the end, his judgment is plain.
One man has to pay at once, one later, while others
altogether escape overtaking by the gods' doom;
but then it always comes in aftertime, and the innocent
pay, the sons of the sinners or those born long afterward.

But here is how we men, be we good, be we evil,
think. Each keeps his own personal notion within
until he suffers. Then he cries out, but all until such time
we take our idiot beguilement in light-weight hopes,
and one who is stricken and worn out in lingering sickness
has taken measures and thinks he will grow healthy, and one
who is a coward expects to turn into a warlike hero.

Another, ugly, thinks of the day when his looks will charm.
If one be penniless and sunk in the struggle of poverty,
he, too, dreams upon the possession of huge estates.
They all rush off on their various business. One goes seafaring
across the wide sea, in ships, where the fish swarm, trying to bring
a little money home, at the mercy of brutal hurricanes,
no hard bargainer for his own life. While another, one
of those whose living is won by the bent plowshare and hard labor,
furrows, year in year out, the tilth of his orchard ground.
One, who has learned Hepháistos' arts and the arts of Athene
and all their skills, by work of his hands assembles a wage.
Yet another, dowered by the grace of Olympian Muses,
has learned control of loveliness in the wisdom of verse.
One the lord far-ranging, Apollo, has made a soothsayer.
He sees the evil coming from far away to a man
when the gods grant such knowledge; yet there is no way for bird sign

nor sacrifice to ward off that which is fated to be.
 Others, who understand the works of Paion with all his
 drugs, are healers. But neither are these complete in their craft,
 seeing that often from a small pain grows a big affliction
 and no one, by giving mild remedies, can take it away,
 while another, who is in agony from wasting afflictions,
 can suddenly be healed by a simple touch of the hand.
 Fate brings humanity her good; she brings him her evil;
 and what the gods give us for gifts no man can refuse.
 Danger, for all, lies in all action, and there is no telling
 which way the end will be after a thing is begun.
 One may be trying to do well and, through failure of foresight,
 may fall into the curse of great disaster, while one
 who acts badly may find God gives him all that he asked for,
 sheer good luck, that sets him free from the fault of his mind.
 But money; there is no end of its making in human endeavor.
 Those among us who have already the biggest estates
 try to get twice as much as they have. Who can satisfy all of them?
 Money, when a man makes it, is the gift of the gods,
 but disaster can grow out of money, and when retribution
 comes at the sending of Zeus, none can tell where it will light.

2 . *Political Verses*

This city of ours will never be destroyed by the planning
 of Zeus, nor according to the wish of the immortal gods;
 such is she who, great hearted, mightily fathered, protects us,
 Pallas Athene, whose hands are stretched out over our heads.
 But the citizens themselves in their wildness are bent on destruction
 of their great city, and money is the compulsive cause.
 The leaders of the people are evil-minded. The next stage
 will be great suffering, recompense for their violent acts,
 for they do not know enough to restrain their greed and apportion
 orderly shares for all as if at a decorous feast.

.....
 they are tempted into unrighteous acts and grow rich.

.....
 sparing the property neither of the public nor of the gods,
 they go on stealing, by force or deception, each from the other,

nor do the solemn commitments of Justice keep them in check;
 but she knows well, though silent, what happens and what has been
 happening,
 and in her time she returns to extract a full revenge;
 for it comes upon the entire city as a wound beyond healing,
 and quickly it happens that foul slavery is the result,
 and slavery wakens internal strife, and sleeping warfare,
 and this again destroys many in the pride of their youth,
 for from enemies' devising our much-ador'd city is afflicted
 before long by conspiracies so dear to wicked men.
 Such evils are churning in the home country, but, of the impoverished,
 many have made their way abroad on to alien soil,
 sold away, and shamefully going in chains of slavery . . .

.....
 Thus the public Ruin invades the house of each citizen,
 and the courtyard doors no longer have strength to keep it away,
 but it overleaps the lofty wall, and though a man runs in
 and tries to hide in chamber or closet, it ferrets him out.
 So my spirit dictates to me: I must tell the Athenians
 how many evils a city suffers from Bad Government,
 and how Good Government displays all neatness and order,
 and many times she must put shackles on the breakers of laws.
 She levels rough places, stops Glut and Greed, takes the force from
 Violence;
 she dries up the growing flowers of Despair as they grow;
 she straightens out crooked judgments given, gentles the swollen
 ambitions, and puts an end to acts of divisional strife;
 she stills the gall of wearisome Hate, and under her influence
 all life among mankind is harmonious and does well.

. 3 .

I gave the people as much privilege as they have a right to:
 I neither degraded them from rank nor gave them free hand;
 and for those who already held the power and were envied for money,
 I worked it out that they also should have no cause for complaint.
 I stood there holding my sturdy shield over both the parties;
 I would not let either side win a victory that was wrong.

Thus would the people be best off, with the leaders they follow:
 neither given excessive freedom nor put to restraint;
 for Glut gives birth to Greed, when great prosperity suddenly
 befalls those people who do not have an orderly mind.

Acting where issues are great, it is hard to please all.

4 . *In Defense of His Policies*

My purpose was to bring my scattered people back
 together. Where did I fall short of my design?
 I call to witness at the judgment seat of time
 one who is noblest, mother of Olympian
 divinities, and greatest of them all, Black Earth.
 I took away the mortgage stones stuck in her breast,
 and she, who went a slave before, is now set free.
 Into this sacred land, our Athens, I brought back
 a throng of those who had been sold, some by due law,
 though others wrongly; some by hardship pressed to escape
 the debts they owed; and some of these no longer spoke
 Attic, since they had drifted wide around the world,
 while those in the country had the shame of slavery
 upon them, and they served their masters' moods in fear.
 These I set free; and I did this by strength of hand,
 welding right law with violence to a single whole.
 So have I done, and carried through all that I pledged.
 I have made laws, for the good man and the bad alike,
 and shaped a rule to suit each case, and set it down.
 Had someone else not like myself taken the reins,
 some ill-advised or greedy person, he would not
 have held the people in. Had I agreed to do
 what pleased their adversaries at that time, or what
 they themselves planned to do against their enemies,
 our city would have been widowed of her men. Therefore,
 I put myself on guard at every side, and turned
 among them like a wolf inside a pack of dogs.

5 . *The Ten Ages of Man*

A child in his infancy grows his first set of teeth and loses them
 within seven years. For so long he counts as only a child.
 When God has brought to accomplishment the next seven-year period,
 one shows upon his body the signs of maturing youth.
 In the third period he is still getting his growth, while on his chin
 the beard comes, to show he is turning from youth to a man.
 The fourth seven years are the time when every man reaches his
 highest
 point of physical strength where men look for prowess achieved.
 In the fifth period the time is ripe for a young man
 to think of marriage and children, a family to be raised.
 The mind of a man comes to full maturity in the sixth period,
 but he cannot now do as much, nor does he wish that he could.
 In the seventh period of seven years and in the eighth also
 for fourteen years in all, his speech is best in his life.
 He can still do much in his ninth period, but there is a weakening
 seen in his ability both to think and to speak.
 But if he completes ten ages of seven years each, full measure,
 death, when it comes, can no longer be said to come too soon.

PHOCÝLIDES OF MÍLETUS

Phocýlides is placed in the middle of the sixth century. His specialty was *gnomai*, epigrams brief and pointed, and frequently beginning with his "signature," as shown in the specimens here translated.

. 1 .

Phocýlides said this also: a city that's small and is founded
 on a cliff's edge, well governed, is stronger than Nineveh crazy.