

Greek Lyric Commentary **Patrick Sullivan, Class of 2026**

Over the past several months, I have worked to produce translations and commentaries of key Greek lyric poets. These included Sappho, Alcaeus, Archilochus, Hipponax, and Pindar. These poets wrote between the Seventh and Sixth Centuries BCE, producing poems of great complexity and beauty. Their themes range from politics to love, daily life to war.

Much of my work consisted of familiarizing myself with the different dialects of each poet. There was no one language for the Greeks; rather, most regions of the Greek world spoke in their own unique dialect. For example, while Sappho and Alcaeus spoke Aeolic Greek, Archilochus spoke Ionic. While these dialects descend from a common language, they differ in the transformation of the original language's sounds. A reader of Greek must familiarize themselves with the way in which a specific dialect has altered or preserved vowel formation.

While tempering myself to these dialects presented a great challenge at the start of the summer, the focus of my project was processing this difficulty for beginner students of Greek. My goal was to make a survey of lyric poets for introductory students. My task was to create a commentary, or guide, to the most famous of the Greek lyric poets. Their poems are notoriously difficult and are typically reserved for higher-level students. As such, commentaries on them are typically written for readers already familiar with dialects and vocabulary. In place of grammar and vocabulary assistance, commentaries on lyric poets tend to have a more historical and philological focus. At a time when Classics departments (including Bowdoin's) are reducing or eliminating language requirements, I felt it would be beneficial to make traditionally inaccessible poets readable for introductory students.

So, the bulk of my project. This section of my work was made up of extensive dictionary work to create glossaries of difficult words and guides to dialectic differences. Using David A. Campbell's *Greek Lyric Poetry*, I made beginner-level commentaries on a selection of poems from each of the authors above. These commentaries will be available for free use for Greek students, allowing new students to read these wonderful texts.

For the final part of my project, I challenged myself to translate several of my favorite poems into English meter. This task required a high level of care to retain the sense of the original Greek in metrical English. I spent most of my time translating the end of Pindar's Eighth Pythian, arguably the most famous excerpt of his oeuvre. I translated his lines in several fashions: once retaining the original Greek meter, once into iambic pentameter, and once into musical English. This part of the project was likely the most challenging, but it was certainly the most fun. It allowed me practice in both Greek and English meters as well as gain an intimate familiarity with Pindar's work.

I have produced new instructional material for teachers and students alike and have massively furthered my own knowledge of Greek for my own future study.

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References

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