Alcmanic Hexameters
and Early Hexametric Poetry:
Alcman’s Poetry in its Oral Context

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The complex relationship between archaic epic and archaic lyric poetry has always been a thorny issue for classicists. The traditional approach was to attribute all the formative or thematic similarities between a lyric and an epic composition to the ‘imitation’ of the epic poem by the lyric poet or the ‘influence’ of the epic poet on the lyric poet. Examples of this approach can be found for almost any archaic Greek poet and his relationship to epic material.1 That approach presupposes that archaic lyric poetry derived from epic poetry in general or even just from Homeric poetry, thus from the Iliad and Odyssey, the Homeric poems par excellence. This view is challenged by recent scholarship in the field.2

As a consequence, this traditional philological method for assessing the relationship between epic and lyric—a word-for-word comparison between a lyric and an epic poem in order to attribute similarities to ‘epic’ or ‘Homeric influence’—is put in question. What is difficult, however, is to find a different


theoretical approach that will be methodologically more accurate and effective. What is equally difficult is to find new terms to describe the relationship between epic and lyric poetry. The terms that have been used, e.g. imitation, influence, allusion, intertextuality, cannot easily be applied to the relationship between a lyric and an epic poem. The terms imitation or influence were used in the past to describe a willing subject, the writer, who echoes the text of another writer voluntarily, and so too the term allusion. Intertextuality can be manifested when we have two or more texts and seek a one-to-one relationship between the two. To be accurate we cannot speak of the existence of texts, i.e. written texts, in the archaic period. Even though writing was used in this period (even for aiding the composition of lyric poetry, according to some scholars) we should bear in mind that we have to do with an oral society or a “song culture,” as some call it, that has its own compositional rules. An archaic epic or lyric poem is not, primarily, a written text. It is mainly an oral

4 See G. B. Conte, The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets (Ithaca 1986) 24–26, for the emphasis put on the intentionality of the author concerning similarities between two or more texts.
performance of a song composed for a specific occasion. Archaic genres are above all defined by the occasion for which they were composed.9

If we cannot use text-based methods for the study of the complex relationship between archaic epic and archaic lyric, one may ask what method we are entitled to use in order to investigate this controversial issue. The answer is that we can take advantage of some of the arguments of oral theory. It is true that calling a poem oral may create more problems than it solves,10 but we cannot do otherwise. This is the approach used in this paper to study the relationship between Alcman’s hexameters and early hexametric poetry. The aim of the paper is to examine the relationship between a group of seven Alcmanic fragments written in dactylic hexameter (26, 28, 43, 77, 80, 104, and 107 PMG)11 and archaic epic and lyric poetry. I examine the metrical, linguistic, and thematic similarities between this group of fragments and epic poetry and I try to reconstruct his position within his oral context, which is a wider epic and lyric context and a narrower context of citharodic preludes to choral songs.

**Epic meter and epic language**

Alcman used ‘epic meter’, thus the dactylic hexameter, in some of his poems as is obvious from these fragments.12 The use of dactylic hexameter it is not in itself a strong indication of an ‘inter textual relationship’ of any kind between Alcman’s songs and epic. In his time when a lyric poet composed his

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12 Some editors do not think that 28 was in hexameters (see Calame, *Alcman* 121). A. Garzya, *Alcmane. I frammenti* (Naples 1954) 113, believes that it was in citharodic dimeter, a meter suitable for a *paian* as he notes.
poems in dactylic hexameter no one would have thought that he was imitating Homer or that he had composed epic poetry, because the genre of a poem was determined by its performative context. As a consequence, these seven fragments do not belong to epic poetry. We cannot be sure, however, if Alcman used this meter because they belonged to a specific poetic genre distinct from his other, non-hexametric poems. The vocabulary in these fragments has much in common with epic poetry. To determine whether using this meter was an indication that Alcman composed a special kind of poetry that belonged to a particular genre and whether his choice of vocabulary was an indication that he sought to resonate with or emulate Homeric poetry, we must examine these hexametric fragments closely.

As to their metric structure, all lines fall into three parts, as do most Homeric hexameters, according to Fränkel’s scheme. As scholars have noted, one of the characteristics of oral poetry is the regularity with which it partitions its phraseology into formulaic semantic units. Alcman’s hexameters are divided into three formulaic semantic units, like the Homeric hexameters, thus like lines that belong to epic poetry.

We begin with fr.26:

οὐ μ’ ἔτι, παρθενικαὶ μελιγύρες ἱαρόφωνοι,
γνώμα φέρνην δύναται· βάλε δή βάλε κηρύλος εἶν,
ὦς τ’ ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ὄµ’ ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτήται
νηδεῖς ἕτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος ἱαρός ὅρνις.

No longer, honey-toned, strong-voiced girls, can my limbs carry me. If only, if only I were a cerylus, who flies along with the halcyons over the flower of the wave with resolute heart, strong, sea-blue bird.

This is one of his most famous fragments. It is quoted by

Antigonus of Carystus, Apollonius Dyscolus, and ancient lexicographers. Some scholars classify this fragment with partheneia, i.e. songs written for and sung by a chorus of maidens. Others believe that it probably belonged to a citharodic prelude of a partheneion.

Alcman’s language, examined closely, proves highly traditional, even formulaic. The word µελιγάρυες is in Homer (Od. 12.187 of the Sirens), the Homeric Hymns (3.519 of song), and Pindar (Ol. 11.4, Pyth. 3.64, Isth. 2.3 of hymns). γυῖα is a common epic noun, found only in plural in the Homeric epics. The phrase νηδεὲς ἦτορ ἕχων is very similar to the Homeric formula νηλεὲς ἦτορ (e.g. Il. 9.497 χρῆ νηλεὲς ἦτορ ἕχων or ἄδεὲς ἦτορ. It is a hapax according to Garzya, or should be emended to νηλεὲς ἦτορ according to Calame. ἀλιπόρφυρος is Homeric but is used by many archaic lyric poets as well. The only true Doric form that we have here is the verb ποτῆται.

The next hexameter fragment to be considered is 28:

Μῶσα Δίος θύγατερ λίγ’ ἀείσο ὁρανίαφι

Muse, daughter of Zeus, I shall sing clearly, heavenly one(?) This probably comes from the beginning of a partheneion, because this was the usual place of the invocation of the Muse in partheneia. It is quoted by many ancient scholars (a scholiast of the Iliad among others) as an example of the use of the ending

16 Page, PMG p.41.
19 Calame, Alcman 475.
20 Garzya, Alemame 145; Calame, Alcman 478.
21 Calame, Alcman 478.
22 For example Anac. fr.447, fr. adesp. 939.19 PMG.
φι for the formation of vocative in Alcman. Garzya agrees with Kodzu that this line is a mere imitation of Homeric language, even though Alcman had lost the criterion to distinguish between the declensions that could be formed by -φι, because vocative was never among them.23 λιγύς was widely used in both epic and lyric (Il. 9.186, Od. 24.62 of the Muses, Pind. Ol. 9.72) and so was οὐράνιος of gods (Pind. Pyth. 2.70, Hymn. Hom. 2.55).24 One Doric characteristic of the language is the substitution of ου with ω in Μῶδα.

Our next hexametric fragment (43) also has something to do with the Muse:

οὐ γὰρ ἐγώνγα ἡμασσα Διὸς θύγατερ

For I, lady, daughter of Zeus … not …

This line probably comes from the beginning of a partheneion25 or of another choral song. It is quoted by Apollonius Dyscolus as an example of the Doric ἐγώνγα. Alcman uses Διὸς θύγατερ par excellence for the Muse (fr.27, 28). In epic the phrase is usually applied to Aphrodite (Od. 22.505, 24.502, Il. 2.547).26

Fr.77 has an epic subject, is composed in dactylic hexameter, and its vocabulary offers an epic twist:

Δύσπαρις, Αἰνόπαρις κακὸν Ἑλλάδι βωτιανείρα

Paris the Evil, Paris the Grim, a disaster for Greece, that nurse of men

This is quoted by Eustathius and a scholiast of Homer as an example of the use of the noun Δύσπαρις. Calame thinks that it probably comes from a prelude of a choral song.27 There is no good reason to doubt this. As to its language, Δύσπαρις is indeed Homeric (Il. 3.39, 13.769). Αἰνόπαρις is a compound

23 Garzya, Alemane 113.
25 Garzya, Alemane 101.
26 Calame, Alcman 507, believes that the “daughter of Zeus” is not the Muse but Athena.
27 Calame, Alcman 489.
from his name and the epic word αἰνός ‘terrible’. Βωτιάνειρα is found in epic (Il. 1.155, Hymn. Hom. 3.363, Hes. fr.165.16 M.-W.).

Fragment 80 comes from Iliadic scholia:
καὶ ποι Ὀδυσσής ταλασίφρονος ὀντ’ ἔταϊρον
Κήρκα ἐπαλείψασα

And once Circe anointing the ears of the companions of stout-hearted Odysseus

Alcman here uses two different Homeric formulae, καὶ τότ’ Ὀδυσσής (Od. 5.297, 5.406, 22.147) and Ὀδυσσής ταλασίφρονος. ταλασίφρον Characterizes Odysseus not only in Homer but in other epic poems as well (e.g. Hes. Theog. 1012). Alcman probably is describing Odysseus’ stopping his companions’ with wax before meeting the Sirens. Homer uses almost the same words (Od. 12.47–48, ἐπὶ οὔατ’ ἀλείψαι ἑταίρων / κηρᾶν δεσπόσας). The participle ἐπαλείψασα, as Calame notes, should have followed the Aeolic form in -αίσα. What we in fact have here is a different formation, and it is possible that it comes from another poetic tradition and not that of Ionic epic.

We do not have much information concerning fr.104:
τίς ἂν τῖς πόκα ράι ἄλλα νόον ἀνδρὸς ἐπίσποι

Who, who could ever tell easily the mind of another man?

It is quoted by Apollonius Dyscolus as an example of the form ράι; ἔπει/ἐπει is more common in epic. The form πόκα is Doric. The content of the fragment is gnomological. It is not impossible that it comes from a partheneion, since Alcman’s partheneia had such elements.

Fragment 107 is quoted by the orator Aristeides:

28 Calame, Aêman 496.
29 Garzya, Aêmane 137; Calame, Aêman 495–496.
30 Calame, Aêman 496.
31 Garzya, Aêmane 139.
32 See for example fr.1.15–20, 36–38.
Πολλαλέγων ὄνως ἄνδρι, γυναικὶ δὲ Πασιχάρηα.

Say-much is the man’s name, Happy-with-all the woman’s.

Garzya insisted that this has a satirical twist, mainly because χάρις and πασι- as compounds are widely used in iambic poetry (e.g. Archilochus 168 W.). He tries to reinforce his argument by claiming that dactylic hexameter was also used for a satirical poem by Hipponax (128 W.). Though his arguments are not entirely compelling, I think that he stresses an important fact: dactylic hexametrical poems could have been composed for many occasions other that the performance of epic poetry. Calame notes that the name Πασιχάρηα is found in masculine form in inscriptions and so it is not certain that these are nicknames invented with a supposedly satirical intent. We cannot in fact guess what this fragment was about and whether Alcman composed satirical poetry or not. One thing is certain: the content of this poem has nothing to do with Homeric poetry.

Scholars recognize that Alcman did not compose in a straightforward or pure Laconian dialect. His language was heavily influenced by a common poetic tradition that existed before and developed simultaneously with what we today call Homeric or epic poetry or the Ionian epos. The distinction between epic and lyric poetry was far from clear during the seventh century B.C. Genre was determined by the occasion of the performance. This common poetic tradition had its own

33 Garzya, Alcmane 153.

34 Calame, Alcman 565–566. Calame thinks that Πασιχάρηα means “the one whom everybody likes” like Astymeloisa, a leader of an Alcmanic parthenion (fr.3).


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language. Its composition and transmission depended on the oral tradition and its rules. Without any doubt Alcman’s dialect is full of inconsistencies, if we suppose that he should have written in the vernacular Doric of his time. These inconsistencies are found in many fragments that have an epic theme or meter. Alcman’s dialect is full of what scholars like to call ‘reminiscences’ or ‘allusions to’ or ‘imitations of’ what we call Homeric language. His hexameters could not be an exception to this rule. As we have seen, they are full of Homeric ‘allusions’ on the linguistic level. Alcman in fact uses words, phrases, epithets, and formulae that are not Homeric, and some of them are widely used in lyric poetry. This argument is supported by numerous examples in his non-hexameter poems and chiefly his partheneia.36

Epic ‘themes’

One of the criteria on which many scholars have based their arguments about ‘Homeric allusions’ or imitation is the presence of epic (usually Homeric) ‘themes’37 in Alcman’s work. What I will try to show is that in these Alcmanic hexameters we do encounter at least four alleged Homeric themes: the invocation of the Muse, ornithological references, the story of Circe, Odysseus, and the Sirens, and an accusation against

36 Some instances: fr.1.3 ποδόκη, an epithet used in Homer (e.g. ll. 10.316, 18.234) but in lyric poetry too (Carm. conv. 894.3 PMG); 1.10 κλόνος, used in Homer (ll. 5.167, 16.331) and the Hesiodic Scutum (148); 1.71 στρατῇ, in Homer (ll. 24.217, Od. 14.173) but also in Hesiod (Theog. 350); 1.78 κ[α]λίσσφρος, in Homer (ll. 14.319, Od. 5.333) but also Hesiod (Theog. 386, etc.); 3.1 Ὄλυμπιάδες, of the Muses in Homer (ll. 2.491), Hesiod (Theog. 25, 52), and Hymn.Hom. 4.450; 3.1 πέρι με φρένας, in Homer (ll. 10.139, 11.89, Od. 9.362) and Hymn.Hom. 3.461; 3.4 ὁπός, used in Homer and in lyric to describe the voice of a person singing (ll. 1.604, Od. 10.221, Pind. Nem. 7.83, Bacch. 17.129, etc.); 3.7 γλυκώς, used of sleep (Od. 2.395, Pind. Pyth. 9. 23); 1.10 ἄκαλοι πόδες (ll. 19.92, Hymn.Hom. 2.287, 4.273, etc.).

37 For a definition of the term as a thematic analogue to the formula see A. B. Lord, “Composition by Theme in Homer and Southslavic Epos,” *TAPA* 82 (1951) 71–80.

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Paris—but these themes are not proof that Alcman imitated Homer. The very existence of these themes (recurrent elements of narrative or description) is a strong characteristic of oral poetry.\textsuperscript{38}

In fr.26 we encounter ornithological references. These are very common in Alcman’s poetry. He uses them to describe either himself and the process of poetic composition (fr.39 ἐπι τάδε καὶ μέλος Ἀλκμᾶν / ἐδρε γεγλωσσαμένον / κακκοβίδοιν ὡσα συνθέμενος, 40 τοίδα δ’ ὄρνισιν νόμως / παντῶν) or a member of the chorus and, usually, the member’s role in the performance (1.60 τοῖς Πεληάδες, 1.86–87 παρσένος μάτων ἀπὸ θράνω λέλακα / γλαύξ, 1.101 κόκκυς, 82 λόσαν δ’ ἄκρακτα νεάνιδες ὧ/τ’ ὅρνις γιέρακος ὑπερπταμένω).

Ornithological images are not Alcman’s or Homers’ invention. Many archaic lyric poets use them for the same reasons, describing a person or referring to themselves and the process of poetic composition. Alcaeus uses such images to describe the effect of fear in a battle context,\textsuperscript{39} not unlike Alcman in 82. Archilochus describes the effect of fear in the same way (fr.224 W.). Anacreon describes a woman as a melodic and gracious χελιδόνα (fr.394a PMG), and claims that he drives himself away from a female like a κόκκυς (437); in 453 he calls someone κοτίλην χελιδ.\textsuperscript{40} Pratinas characterizes a bird as ἀδύφωνον (711 PMG).

Ornithological references are not only used of persons but also of the compositional process, especially in Pindar and Bacchylides, e.g. Pind. Ol. 2.86–88 σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδώς φυ. / μεθόντες δὲ λαβροὶ / παγγλωσσία κόρακες ὃς ἄκραντα γαρνέτων / Διός πρὸς ὄρνιχα θεῖον, Bacch. 4.7–8 έλακε δ’

\textsuperscript{38} Lord, \textit{TAPA} 82 (1951) 73.

\textsuperscript{39} E.-M. Voight, \textit{Sappho and Alcaeus} (Amsterdam 1971): Alcaeus (52 V.) or fr. incertum (10 V.).

\textsuperscript{40} Anacreon, according to the ancient tradition, was a composer of partheneia (Athen. 600D, Lucian \textit{Ver.hist.} 2.15), so it is not impossible that fr.437 and 453 could be choral songs and that a maiden is compared to a bird as in Alcman’s partheneia.
The specific bird that Alcman refers to in fr. 26 is the halcyon, whose myth of giving birth during winter was a common lyric theme (Stesich. fr. 248 PMG, Ibyc. 265, Sappho Test. 195 V., etc.) and was not merely a Homeric one.

Two of our fragments (28, 43) have invocations of the Muse. This is one of the most prominent motifs of Alcman’s poetry. The Muses, or just one Muse, are invoked several times in his other poems (3.1–5, 5, perhaps 8, 14a, 27, 28, 30, and probably 1 Calame), and not only in his hexameters. The invocation of the Muse was a prominent theme of epic poetry, but was also used in many different lyric compositions.

In fr. 28 an anonymous subject declares his or her intention to sing about the Muse, the daughter of Zeus. Both 27 and 28 are thought to come from choral songs. Διὸς θύγατερ is found in the hexameter fr. 43, which belongs either to a partheneion or to a sympotic context. What is remarkable here is that, as Calame notes, the poet is the subject of choral activity and not the Muse as is usual in Homeric epic (e.g. Il. 1.1, 2.484, Od. 1.1). Homer is not the only poet who begins his hexametric poems with an invocation to the Muse. Hesiod too calls upon the Muse for inspiration (ταῦτα μοι ἔσπετε Μοῦσαι Ὀλύμπια δῶµαι· ἔχουσαι, Theog. 114), as do the poets of the Homeric

Calame, Alcman 466, As G. Scafoglio notes, “Two Fragments of the Epic Cycle,” GRBS 46 (2006) 6–7, this kind of invocation to the Muse is usual in lyric poetry and not unusual in cyclic poetry. Scafoglio mentions as an example the proem of the Ilias Parva (fr. 1 Bernabé = 2 dub. Davies) where the poet speaks in the first person and claims authorship for his poetry (Μοῦσα ἦν ἐνέπεκ κεῖνα, / τὰ µήτ’ ἐγένοντο πάροιχκε / µήτ’ ἔσται µετέπισθεν). He holds that the call to the Muse for inspiration and the willingness of the poet to present himself as the subject of poetic activity do exist at least in the Ilias Parva and maybe in other non-Homeric epic.

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In Hesiod and in the Hymns, and even in the Odyssey in comparison with the Iliad, the poet uses the first person, as in Alcman’s hexameters, thus showing a special level of self-awareness.

The opening invocation of the Muses appears from Homeric epic and onwards and can be found in many victory odes of Pindar (e.g Ol. 3.3–4, Nem. 9.1), in Stesichorus (fr.33 PMG), and in other lyric poets. Thus the invocation of the Muse is not a clear indication that Alcman had in mind or imitated any kind of early hexametric poetry or that the work belonged to a specific kind of poetry quite distinct from his partheneia.

A low opinion of Paris is expressed in fr.77: but that is a topos of the whole Greek poetic tradition.45 A clear illustration of this can be seen in tragedy (Aes. Ag. 713, Eur. Hel. 1120, Hec. 944 ff.). It is obvious that we are not dealing with mere imitation of epic poetry.

Garzya holds that many of these fragments have an epic coloring. When he refers to epic he usually means Homeric, that is, what we find in the Iliad and Odyssey that we have today. Commenting on fr.80, Garzya claims that some fragments in Alcman’s corpus concern Odysseus: 70c, 74, 80, 81, 84.46 He does not suggest that Alcman imitated Homer’s Odyssey, but if his hypothesis is right this can be an indication of an intertextual relationship of any kind between these fragments and the Odyssey or pre-Odyssey. To assess this we need to examine closely this ‘influenced by the Odyssey’ group of fragments before returning to fr.80. What we will find is not that they are definitely not influenced by the Odyssey, but that they are not a group.

Fr.70c, σὲ γὰρ ἄζοµαι, “for I stand in awe of you,” is quoted by Apollonius Dyscolus. Calame thinks that this may not be-

45 Calame, Alcman 490.

46 Garzya, Alcmane 137: “Evidente richiamo al noto episodio dell’ Odissea (XII 37ss.; v. 47: ἐτι δ’ οὐκ ἄλειψαι ἑταῖρος ἔτερον; frr. probabilmente riguardanti Odisseo 13, 40, 64, 66.”

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long to Alcman and assigns it to *fragmenta dubia*. Page includes it as Alcman, but makes clear that it is “sine nome auctoris.” The meter is *Kürzvers*. Apollonius says only that Δωρεῖς use τε instead of σε, so we are entitled to be in doubt about authorship.

A grammarian quotes fr.74, ἤσκε τις Καφεύς ἐνάσσων. The possible connection between the *Odyssey* or epic genre and this fragment depends, mainly, on the reading of Καφεύς. Garzya suggests that we read σκαφεύς, as in the MSS. (he translates “signore della nave” = captain). In this way he states that is not impossible to connect this fragment with Odysseus’ journey. But even if we read σκαφεύς there is no reason to relate fr.74 to Odysseus. He was certainly not the first and only Greek hero who had connections with the sea and travel.

Calame suggests that either of two Greek kings with the name Κηφεύς—Kepheus of Tegea who may have taken part along with Heracles in the battle against the sons of Hippocoon (Apollod. 2.7.3) or Kepheus of Ethiopia, the father of Andromeda—could be the subject of the fragment and notes that the meter (trochaics) is the same as in fr.68, which he believes relates to the *Aithiopis*; so if fr.74 refers to Kepheus of Ethiopia it probably belongs to the same poem as 68 and surely to the same context. We cannot know much about the context of fr.74, but what we can say is that it need not be connected to Odysseus and his travels.

Fr.81, Ζεῦ πάτερ, αἱ γυρὸ ἐμοὶ πόσις εἶν, may have an Odyssean prototype. It was sung by a maiden chorus (so either a *partheneion* or a wedding song) and has many lyric parallels. Garzya and Janni believe that Alcman was heavily influenced

47 Calame, *Alcman* 205.
50 Alcman mentions boats and navigation even in connection to Dionysus in fr.93. On this see Calame, *Alcman* 495.
51 Calame, *Alcman* 487, 496.
by *Odyssey* 6 in composing this, and they note that the line is almost identical to 6.244. A scholiast to the *Odyssey* highlights that Ἀλκάνσαν αὐτῶν μετεβάλε παρθένους λέγουσας εἰςάγων, Alcman changed his Odyssean prototype by putting these words in the mouth of the maidens of the chorus: the speaker is not Nausicaa but the maidens of the chorus, so this fragment belongs most probably to a *partheneion*. Garzya and Calame accept that Alcman’s literary prototype was *Od.* 6.244, αἲ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τούσδε πόσις κεκλημένος εἶη, “Would that a man such as he might be called my husband.” Nausicaa addresses these words to the maiden servants of the palace who accompany her. Calame notes that similar prayers can be found in Alcman 1.70 and in 3.81, but there in a homoerotic context. We also encounter them in Archilochus (177, 197 W.), Hipponax (38 W.), and Alcaeus (691 V.). Calame suggests that Alcman combined *Od.* 6.244 with an expression found in *Od.* 7.311 (αἲ γὰρ, Ζεῦ πάτερ). He holds that this fragment belonged to a wedding song, because the context does not seem homoerotic. The meter is dactylic tetrameter (alemunicum).

Fr. 84 is quoted by Eustathius: ἐπ’ ἀριστερὰ χειρὸς ἔχον, “having upon his left hand.” We cannot be certain of its context. Bergk adds a preceding <ἄρκτον δ’>, relying on *Od.* 5.275–276, ἀνοιγε Ἀλκυσω, διὰ θεάων, ποντοπορεύεσθαι ἐπ’ ἀριστερὰ χειρὸς ἔχοντα (“for this star Calypso, the beautiful goddess, had bidden him to keep on the left hand as he sailed over the sea”). He believes that this part of the poem had something to do with Odysseus wanting to leave Scheria. Garzya thinks that the line is in dactylic meter, probably

54 Calame, *Alcman* 563.
hexameter. Calame disagrees and thinks that it has the same meter as 93 (anapaestic). It is interesting that 93, quoted by Ammonius, is also preserved in P.Med.inv. 72.10 (fr.160 Calame), which probably belongs to a Dionysiac context. The papyrus has the word ἰστοπέδαις, so we can be sure that this fragment mentioned the sea and ships. But having the same meter and a reference to the sea is not enough to build an argument that 84 and 93 (or fr.160 Calame) belong to the same poem, and to suppose that 84 is a mere imitation or a creative adaption of Od. 5.276 is equally wrong. The subject of ἔξων can be anyone, from a person of myth to a male chorus leader of a partheneion.

As to fr.80, it is almost impossible that it belongs to a particular group of poems that imitated a specific Odyssean passage. All we have is a similarity between one Odyssean line and a line that is preserved from Alcman’s poem. Alcman wrote a hexametrical poem or some lines in hexameters in a poem with combined meters, speaking about a traditional subject, Odysseus’ encounter with the Sirens. We do not have decisive proof that the similarity between these lines and the Odyssey is a mere coincidence. It is also true that anyone who wishes to declare that this is more than mere coincidence does not have compelling evidence.

Alcman’s hexameters and their oral context

The elements that link Alcman and Homer in these fragments are the following: the adjectives μελιγάρυες and ἁλιπόρφυρος (26), λίγειος and οὐράνιος (28), Δύσπαρις and βωτιάρις (77), ταλασίφρων (80), the noun γυῖα (26), and the quasi-Homeric formulae νηδεὲς ἔχων (26), Διὸς θύγατερ (43), καὶ πόκ’ Ὀδυσσῆος ταλασίφρων (80). I will begin with the formulae, explaining why I characterize them as quasi-Homeric.

58 Garzya, Alcman 140.
59 Calame, Alcman 223.
60 Cf. Calame, Alcman 582.
The phrase νηλεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων is a common Homeric formula for the spirit of a warrior (e.g. Il. 9.497). It seems that Alcman slightly altered this formula, which describes the rigidness of the heart of a warrior, to describe the spirit of an aged king-fisher who wants to be carried away by the young females of his species. We can assume that this new formulation was a false epicism with comic connotations. Other words here are also used in the Homeric Hymns, in Anacreon, and in Pindar and not only in Homer. Moreover, the weakened limbs of old age connects Alcman to Sappho (58 V.). As we saw above, the ornithological references, very common among Alcman’s partheneia, are also found in Alcaeus, Archilochus, Anacreon, Pindar, and Bacchylides. In fr.28, although Alcman seems ‘influenced’ by Homeric language he has lost the criterion of distinguishing between the declensions (adding -φι to the vocative). He uses words that appear not only in epic but also in lyric. Διὸς θύγατερ (fr.43) is used no longer for Aphrodite as in epic. The invocation of the Muse is found in other lyric poems. The vocabulary of fr.77 has an epic twist, but this can be true for its content.

Fr.80 has a new formation derived from two ‘Homeric’ formulae; one of them is also found in the Theogony. Alcman adds his own twist both to the story and to the language. As we have seen, this fragment does not belong to a group of other fragments that describe a particular Odyssean story or imitate a particular Odyssean passage. On the contrary, the other fragments that supposedly are linked to this one and to the Odyssey point in different directions: they are connected to the Aithiopis (maybe fr.74), to lyric poetry (81), and maybe to a Dionysiac context (84). Fr.104 has the Doric form πόκα and the non-epic ῥάι. From fr.107 all we can deduce is that a hexameter poem can have a distinctly non-epic content and even a satirical one, as in Hipponax.

Homeric adjectives used by Alcman in his hexameters are not all Homeric. They are used by many other epic and lyric poets (with the exception of Δύσπαρις). Alcman in his hexameters uses Doric forms not found in Homer or in other Ionic...
epic. He does not always use epic words when he has the chance. The language and ‘epic themes’ of his partheneia, as known both from direct and indirect tradition, are connected equally to Homeric and to Hesiodic poetry, to the Homeric Hymns, and to the compositions of other choral poets like Pindar and Bacchylides, and in some fragments to the epic cycle (Aithiopis, Arimaspeia).61

One may ask why these poems are written in dactylic hexameter, if not in order to allude to Homeric poetry or to epic poetry in general. Are they choral? Could they belong to cultic or to non-cultic songs? Could they be sung by a chorus of maidens like Alcman’s partheneia? Are they preludes to choral songs? Can a reading within their oral context lead to any decisive conclusions? Unfortunately we cannot give a certain answer to these questions. All we can do is to make some tentative based on our observations.

Regarding Alcman’s hexameters, Bowra made the attractive suggestion that some (including fr.26 and 77) were like the prooimia attributed to Terpander.62 Recently Power expressed an interesting view which is close to Bowra’s. He claimed that 26 probably came from a prooimion sung solely by the cithara player and that 38 and 39, though not hexametrical, may come from similar songs.63 He also suggested that Sappho takes a similar role in a fragment that possibly belonged to a prooimion

61 C. M. Bowra, On Greek Margins (Oxford 1990) 73 n.2 and 85 n.1, links the Scythian horse of fr.1.59 (a partheneion) and the Scythian mountain of 90 with the Arimaspeia of Aristeas, although Aristeas might have composed a little later than Alcman. G. Devereux, “The Kolaxaian Horse of Alkman’s Partheneion,” CQ 15 (1965) 183, also thinks that Alcman was influenced by the Arimaspeia as to the names of the horses in fr.1.

62 Bowra, Greek Lyric 22–25; in suggesting that fr.77 might be a prooimion, he assumed that these preludes had many mythological references. He thought that these Alcmanic prooimia were closer to lyric than to epic, mainly because of their subject-matter, and secondly because he believed that they probably were sung and not recited, given the “regularity of the metric system” (in his view Alcman uses pure dactyls and no spondees).

(58 V.): the speaker declares that old age has made her knees weak, so they cannot lift her body’s weight, as in Alcman 26—both fragments have the theme of the weakness of the speaker due to old age. Power thinks that this may have been a common theme of these prooimia that excused the limited role of the cithara player in the performance. He also suggests that Alcman 107 may have be from a prooimion. He thinks that other non-hexametrical fragments (14, 27, 29) were abbreviated proemial invocations sung by the chorus to mark the start of their own singing and were self-consciously distinct from the ensuing prooimia. What these choral prooimia have in common with our fragments is the invocation of the Muse (14a, 27), a reference to Zeus (29), a probable description of the occasion of the performance (rites of the cult of Helen in Therapne, 14b), and a possible reference to a hero like Odysseus (which led Calame to attribute this fragment to the mythical part of a song inspired somehow by Odyssey 5). It would be very interesting, then, to treat all these hexametrical fragments as parts of prooimia and read them within that generic context. We do not have decisive indications for this, but it is a possibility to be considered.

Thus, fr.26 is taken to be a prelude to a partheneion by many scholars. A chorus of maidens is indeed mentioned. The fragment is built on a series of traditional topoi: the theme of old age, the theme of the halcyon, and the parallelism of a poet to a bird. Alcman’s contribution is the combination of these themes. Fr.28 and 43 clearly come from the beginning of a song, and probably a choral one. They belong to the traditional (epic and lyric) theme of the invocation of the Muse. Alcman differentiates himself from epic not only by the use of

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64 As Calame notes (Alcman 349), the subject of the choral activity here is not the Muse, but the maidens of the chorus.

65 Calame, Alcman 353–354.

66 Calame, Alcman 355.

67 By traditional we mean topoi that belong to complementary, and almost undistinguishable in Alcman’s time, epic and lyric traditions.

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Doric forms, but by making the poet (or the chorus) and not the Muse herself the subject of the choral activity. Fr.77 is embedded in the traditional rhetoric on the unmanliness of Paris. If it belongs to a *partheneion* it must come from the mythic part of the song situated in the first lines (cf. 1.1–39). The same can be said of fr.80: it takes up the traditional theme of Odysseus’ encounter with the Sirens. We do not have many parallels, but, to judge from the *Odyssey*, we can see that Alcman differentiates himself by making Circe and not Odysseus the one who fills the ears with wax. This element can even be regarded as an indication that these lines belonged to a *partheneion*. Fr.104 might belong to the end of the first part of a *partheneion*, because after the mythic section, a gnomological sentiment usually occurs (e.g. 1.35–37). It uses the theme of the swift change of mind. As for the supposedly satirical fr.107, we can compare Pindar’s *daphrophorikon* (94b S.-M.) where at the beginning he mentions the names of the family-members who participate in the choral performance (lines 9–10). It is not impossible that these were real names—perhaps the parents of a maiden or participants in the choral performance of a *partheneion* or another choral song—but we cannot make further assumptions about fr.107.

As we have seen, these hexameters do not belong to the epic tradition and do not imitate or allude to Homeric poetry. They are not a mere imitation of Homer, but are knitted in a complex oral web that includes a wider epic tradition, clearly wider than Homer and wider than the Ionic epic. This poetical tradition included not only epic poetry, but lyric as well. To use a phrase from scholarship on epic, we can speak of ‘traditional referentiality’—the collective tradition (a common epic and lyric tradition) as a whole resonates through each and every example of an utterance, whether a word, phrase, motif, or

68 Corinna fr.654 PMG has been considered a *partheneion* on similar arguments: D. J. Rayor, “Korinna: Gender and the Narrative Tradition,” *Arethusa* 26 (1993) 224, 228.
story pattern. If these fragments were indeed prooimia of choral songs (most likely of parthenia) then we should not only reckon the thematic and linguistic affinities between them and the wide lyric and epic tradition, but also should try to discern the implications that this categorization may have for reading them.

The only references to citharodic preludes of choral songs are in Thucydides (3.104.3–6) and in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (156–174). Power suggested that Sappho fr.58 V. may have belonged to the same category. Thucydides informs us that the Hymn to Apollo was a prelude to the song sung by a maiden chorus for Apollo on Delos and cites the lines of this prooimium. Here the poet speaks for himself and asks the maidens to remember him and mention him when they are asked who is the best local aoidos. He says that the maidens, after praising the gods and then the heroes, sing a song that imitates all the human voices and sounds (160–164):

> μησάμενα ἀνδρῶν τε παλαιῶν ἢδὲ γυναικῶν
> ὑμνον ἡεῖδουσιν, θέλγουσι δὲ φύλ᾽ ἀνθρώπων.
> πάντων δ᾽ ἀνθρώπων φωνές κοί κρεμβαλαστήν
> μιμεῖσθ᾽ ἵππαιν: φαίν δὲ κεν αὐτός ἐκαστος
> φθέγγεσθ᾽· οὔτω σφιν καλὴ συνάρησιν ᾠδῆ.

All we can deduce from the extremely fragmentary 58 V. is that the speaker (possibly Sappho, if this is a prelude to a song) speaks about her gray hair and her old age that makes her knees weak and so makes it difficult to take part in the choral performance.

If we read Alcman’s hexameters in this context we can see

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69 Foley, Homer’s Traditional Art 33–34; B. Graziosi and J. Haubold, Homer: The Resonance of Epic (London 2005) 9. Rosenmeyer, MD 39 (1997) 142, expresses a similar idea about Sappho’s relationship with Homeric poetry, citing Helen in 16 V.: “With one brief allusion to Helen, an entire epic cycle is evoked, other words, other texts, a counterpoint for Sappho’s lyrical ellipses. Neither Sappho nor Helen can be ‘contained,’ but expand to include countless variations on their stories, looking simultaneously to the past and to the future.”

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that they exhibit some of the characteristics of the genre described by Thucydides and exemplified by the *Homerica Hymn* and possibly by Sappho: they praise or invoke the gods (or other divinities like the Muses), they refer to figures of myth, and they offer the theme of the weakness of the cithara player that prevents him from an active part in choral performance. We can also assume that after the mythic references a moral conclusion was drawn or that the names (generic or real) of some of the chorus members were mentioned. We get the same image from fragments that Power regards as choral *prooimia*. We can conclude that Alcman adopted a quasi-epic linguistic, metrical, and thematic register especially in preludes of *partheneia* and that he let resonate through them the full tradition of citharodeic preludes. Whether or not these hexametric poems were recited by a solo cithara player or by the chorus, what is important here is that the poems exploit the whole tradition of hexametric preludes to choral songs sung by a maiden chorus.

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