



Summary :

Probably the earliest elegiac poet. He was born and lived in Ephesus in the 7th c. BC. Few works have survived in heroic tone and Homeric style.

Date and Place of Birth

mid-7th c. BC – Ephesus

Date and Place of Death

early 6th c. BC

Main Role

Elegiac poet

1. Biography

Callinus lived in the mid-7th century BC. He was contemporary with [Archilochus](#) and was born in [Ephesus](#). He lived when the Cimmerian invasions were seriously threatening the Greeks of Asia Minor (around 675 BC). The [Cimmerians](#) lived in the Tauric Peninsula, in Crimea, on the northern coasts of the Black Sea and raided Asia Minor under [Scythian](#) pressure. They caused extensive damages to the Greek cities of Asia Minor, while Ephesus was gravely threatened by barbarians who coveted its prosperity. In that difficult period Callinus witnessed the collapse of the Phrygian state and the destruction by fire of the [Artemisium](#) in his birthplace.

2. Work

Callinus was among the creators of political [elegy](#), which was recited for as long as the Greek city bustled with activity and orators had not been replaced with poets yet. Callinus belonged to war aristocracy and his elegies asked for maximum effort and the utmost sacrifice. The poet wrote war elegies asking for sacrifices and struggle, thus trying to keep up the morale of his fellow citizens by advocating bravery in war as the highest ideal. Only a few verses have survived from his poetry and therefore his picture as a poet cannot be complete. An important extract and some verses have survived from his elegies. Callinus wrote one of the oldest elegiac poems (around 660 BC), in which he invites his fellow citizens to fight against their enemies. In other verses he asks [Zeus](#) to help [Smyrna](#).¹

The only long surviving extract, perhaps a complete elegy, consists of 21 verses. It is a military song sounding out of tune amidst the feast, an appeal to the young of [Ionia](#) to shake off lighthearted attitudes, seek salvation and fight bravely to confront the enemy. These verses reveal the main influence of early elegiac poetry, whenever and however this might have happened. The content and the language are so much influenced by epic poetry that to some extent elegy may be considered as a branch of the epic.² Elegy is penetrated by the poet's anxiety. The aged poet rises in protest and asks for control while offering advice and encouragement. His love for his fatherland makes him severe, critical but also a persuasive spiritual leader, who must not have been inexperienced in war. His language comes directly from the Homeric epics.³ In addition, the basic subjects of Callinus' war elegy are derived from the Homeric epics and particularly the heroic world of the Iliad. The world of the Odyssey, with its adventurous and peaceful spirit, is not appropriate for an elegiac poet.

3. Evaluation – Judgements

Ancient critics held fruitless discussions about whether it was Callinus or Tyrtaeus who invented elegy, each with his supporters. It is certain that these were the first elegiac poets whose verses were put down to words. Callinus was a remarkable poet, capable of writing poems of undisputed freshness and directness only by using traditional and standard material.⁴



1. Bowra, C.M., *Early Greek Elegists* (Cambridge 1938).
2. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, U. von, *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin 1921), p. 38.
3. Lesky, A., *Ιστορία της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*, . Α.Γ. Τσοπανάκης (trnsl.) (Thessaloniki 1990), p. 187.
4. Easterling, P.E., *Ιστορία της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* (Athens 1990), p. 278.

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Webliography :

	Kallinos - Griechische Lyrik http://www.gottwein.de/Grie/lyr/lyr_kallin01.php
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Glossary :

	elegy, the Poetical type originating from laments. It was escorted by aulos while being sung. Its metrical system was the so-called elegiac couplet.
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Sources



Poetarum Elegiacorum Testimonia et Fragmenta, Gentili B. (ed.), Prato C., I-II, 2. (ed). Leipzig 1988

Quotations

“Μέχρις τεῦ κατάκεισθε; κόντ' ἄλκιμον ἔξετε θυμόν,
ὦ νέοι; οὐδ' αἰδεῖσθ' ἀμφιπερικτίονας
ὧδε λίην μεθιέντες; ἐν εἰρήνῃ δὲ δοκεῖτε
ἦσθαι, ἀτὰρ πόλεμος γαῖαν ἄπασαν ἔχει.
«εὐ νύ τις ἀσπίδα θέσθω ἐν ἀντιβίοις πολεμίζων»
καὶ τις ἀποθνήσκων ὕστατ' ἀκοντισάτω.
τιμῆν τε γάρ ἐστι καὶ ἀγλαὸν ἀνδρὶ μάχεσθαι
γῆς πέρι καὶ παίδων κουριδίης τ' ἀλόχου
δυσμενέσιν· θάνατος δὲ τότε ἔσσειται, ὀκκότε κεν δὴ
Μοῖραι ἐπικλώσωσ'· ἀλλὰ τις ἰθὺς ἴτω
ἔγχος ἀνασχόμενος καὶ ὑπ' ἀσπίδος ἄλκιμον ἦτορ
ἔλσας, τὸ πρῶτον μειγνυμένου πολέμου.
οὐ γάρ κως θάνατόν γε φυγεῖν εἰμαρμένον ἐστὶν
ἄνδρ', οὐδ' εἰ προγόνων ἦι γένος ἀθανάτων.

.....
πολλάκι δηϊότητα φυγῶν καὶ δουῖπον ἀκόντων
ἔρχεται, ἐν δ' οἴκῳ μοῖρα κίχεν θανάτου.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν οὐκ ἔμπης δῆμῳ φίλος οὐδὲ ποθεινός,
τὸν δ' ὀλίγος στενάχει καὶ μέγας, ἦν τι πάθῃ·
λαῶι γὰρ σύμπαντι πόθος κρατερόφρονος ἀνδρὸς
θνήσκοντος, ζώων δ' ἄξιος ἡμιθέων·
ὥσπερ γὰρ μιν πύργον ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ὀρῶσιν·
ἔρδει γὰρ πολλῶν ἄξια μῦθος ἐών.”

GP 1 (= *Elegiacorum Testimonia et Fragmenta*, Gentili B.(ed.), Prato C., I-II, 2. (ed.) Leipzig 1988)