

Naming, Memory, and Omission in Ibycus 282a

In this paper I examine the figure of Troy and its relationship with naming and memory throughout Ibycus fr. 282a (PMG). By investigating several Homeric intertexts, including one that has gone previously unremarked, I demonstrate that Ibycus builds on two related concerns throughout the poem: first, the role of naming, and second, the destruction of cities. His focus on the “unnamable day” (ἄμαρ ἀνόνημον) of Troy’s fall (line 15), I argue, combines these concerns in response to a specific Homeric omission: that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do not cover, in real narrative time, the actual day of Troy’s destruction.

I begin by showing how Ibycus constructs a tangible material presence for Troy throughout the first part of the poem, introducing a subtle distinction between the city as a place and the Trojan people who inhabit it. I then examine several Homeric intertexts that express Ibycus’ concern with naming and specificity as well as the threatened or realized destruction of cities. Although Ibycus has been maligned for his surplus of Homeric-sounding epithets (e.g. Page 1951; Campbell 1982), these intertexts, I suggest, reveal a deliberately contrastive play between the accumulation of names and the threat of obliteration or oblivion, an interplay that colors Ibycus’ description of Troy’s sack as an “unnamable day” (ἄμαρ ἀνόνημον). Ibycus’ reluctance to name Troy here facilitates the city’s disappearance from the poem, an abrupt exit that underscores the precarity of memory.

At the same time, Ibycus’ focus on Troy’s destruction and naming helps us to realize the significance of Troilus’ introduction as an exemplar of beauty at the end of the poem. Ibycus transfers our attention from the Troy of Homer, which has vanished from the poem, to the similarly-named Troilus, a move that reiterates the importance of naming in 282a. More importantly, because the beautiful Troilus is more aligned with Ibycus’ own medium of erotic,

lyric poetry, this emphatic focal shift bolsters Ibycus' poetic authority and acts as a vehicle of his self-definition against Homeric epic.

Focusing next on this relationship between Ibycus and Homer, I argue that Ibycus' fixation on the "day" of Troy's fall responds to a specific Homeric omission: the day of Troy's destruction. I consider how Ibycus' emphasis on the materiality of the Trojan citadel exposes an interest in the physical ruins of Troy and their fate, similar to the scholiasts' later fascination with the "real" Troy and objects like the Homeric walls (Porter 2010). I close by reflecting on the place of Ibycus 282a in the larger discussion about early lyric responses to Homer, especially lyric poets' use of material structures or objects to engage with a potentially incomplete or fallible Homeric account. Overall, my reading of Troy and its fall within Ibycus 282a sheds new light on these specific ways in which Ibycus, through themes of naming and omission, interacts with Homeric epic.

Bibliography

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