

Pittacus the Scapegoat

Alcaeus' attacks on Pittacus, the tyrant of Mytilene, generate a discourse in which a diseased body and flawed character/regime are tightly intertwined. The poet depicts his enemy as a god-cursed contagious figure who spreads his illness to the state itself and who thus must be removed—the way scapegoats are. Yet, the ritual of the city's cleansing is never completed. For, although Pittacus is cast out from the poet's core circle, the aristocratic *hetaireia*, he remains within the larger community (*polis*), even becoming its ruler. Scholars have discussed Pittacus as a scapegoat in the important fragment 129 V (Gagné 2013: 217; Bachvarova 2007: 183-6; Faraone: 1993: 60–80; Fileni 1983: 29-35), but there are other (more oblique) instances, too, that have passed unnoticed. In this paper, I address these omissions and suggest that Alcaeus transforms Pittacus into a scapegoat not only by denouncing him as the curse of the city (fr. 129), but also by giving him a pathogenic body (fr. 429) that figuratively contaminates the city (fr. 306 i), and by (wishfully) punishing him in a fitting way—stoning (fr. 68, 298). By providing a more comprehensive discussion, I show that the treatment of Pittacus as a scapegoat permeates Alcaeus' corpus more thoroughly than recognized, providing a religious justification to purely political activity: the tyrant's removal from power and the return of the Mytilenian aristocracy to its accustomed privileged place.

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