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Callinus (ca. 650 B.C.)

Callinus, from Ephesus in Asia Minor, was a contemporary of Solon, and might be coupled with him in thought, as a fellow lyricist of public spirited vigor—and of course poetic skill. (As we proceed with this section of post-epic lyrics, which pressed for a hearing in the seventh and sixth centuries, you will be noting how deeply this movement tracks the course of change in Greek society. Whereas the epic world, clannish and local, for centuries turned around prowess and wealth—as well as the grand outwardliness of the epic tradition—the lyric age, which sets in roughly on the heels of the Peisistratean Recension, and the 'outing' of Homer into print, battens on the new communal values of the early polis, with its increasing freedoms of expression, its receptiveness to individual moods and tones, and its stimulus to public artistic competitions.) Like Solon—and Alcaeus and Tyrtaeus (# 16))—Callinus seems to have been martial in spirit, and happy to contribute his work to the defence of his own community. Like Alcaeus and Sappho he created a signature meter—the elegiac couplet.

The following—in a version patched together from broken papyri—are a few lines from the longest whole version of a Callinus poem:

> *With no thought of retreat, with no terror confessed,*
> *Hurl your last dart in dying, or strike your last blow.*
> *Oh, 't is noble and glorious to fight for our all,--*
> *For our country, our children, the wife of our love!*
> *Death comes not the sooner; no soldier shall fall,*
> *Ere his thread is spun out by the sisters above.*

The translation is dated, but the thrust of the sentiment is clear. Little seems left to explain, and yet there is everything yet to discuss, about the tone the poet establishes. The 'thread' that is 'spun out' is that measuring thread to which each of our lives is attached, and which is at the mercy of the Three Fates, the three Sisters who snip off our life lines at their whim or will. The concepts themselves, the 'noble' and the 'glorious,' are thin counterparts of the Greek t*ime* and *aglaon*. *Time* is the meaning-encrusted code word for the entire honor system of the warrior, while *aglaon*, which means essentially 'bright' and 'glowing,' has a metaphorical richness not easily reached with a faded English word like 'glorious.'