HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Anacreon (582 B.C.-485 B.C.)

Anacreon was born in Teos, in Asia Minor, to a prosperous family. At a young age he was forced to flee to Thrace, in Northern Greece, for his community was brought under heavy pressure from the advances of the Persian ruler, Cyrus. (Such incursions from the Persians were already common among the Greeks in Asia Minor, many decades before the actual Persian Wars would begin.) In Thrace the refugees from Teos founded what was to be an important city, Abdera. While growing up in Abdera Anacreon became to polish his precocious poetic skills, which included lyre performances as well as skilled metrics with his own tweak, later called *anacreontics*; he wrote exclusively in the ancient Ionian dialect. From Abdera Anacreon was summoned to the court of Polycrates on the island of Samos, where he shone as a brilliant light of the King's sophisticated entourage. (Anacreon performed his best work in the setting of a court, where his capacity to bring forth subtle and desired praise of the royal was appreciated and remunerated.) From Samos Anacreon was invited to Athens, where the ruler Hipparchus reigned at the center of a talented group of artists, among whom the poet Simonides, whom Anacreon came to know. Ultimately, in the course of a long life, Anacreon returned to Teos, where he was buried, leaving behind him a legacy of elegant poems of which some, not all, were of *the eat, drink, and be merry* sort.

The reputation of Anacreon for high living was probably quite wrong—look at his lifespan!—and in fact, though he dealt with a vigorous love of life, he hated nothing more than debauchery, which he excoriated as a barbarian vice. He remains truly Greek in this respect.

Horns to bulls wise Nature lends;
Horses she with hoofs defends;
Hares with nimble feet relieves;
Dreadful teeth to lions gives;
Fishes learn through streams to slide;
Birds through yielding air to glide;
Men with courage she supplies;
But to women these denies.
What then gives she? Beauty, this
Both their arms and armor is:
She, that can this weapon use,
Fire and sword with ease subdues.