



# Corinna

## The Fragments

DELPHI  CLASSICS

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*The Fragments of*

**CORINNA**

(fl. 6th century BC)



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Corinna (1870) by Charles Peter Mason

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*



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Version 1

*The Collected Works of*  
**CORINNA OF TANAGRA**



*By Delphi Classics, 2025*

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## The Translations



*Tanagra, a town north of Athens, Boeotia — Corinna's birthplace*

## The Fragments of Corinna



*Translated by J. M. Edmonds, Loeb Classical Library, 1927*

One of the few female poets from ancient Greece whose work survives (albeit in fragments), Corinna was a lyric poet from Tanagra in Boeotia. Although ancient sources portray her as a contemporary of Pindar (born c. 518 BC), some modern scholars question the accuracy of this tradition. The dating of her life has been the subject of much debate since the early twentieth century, with dates ranging from the beginning of the fifth century to the late third century BC. The fragments include three substantial sections of poems, which are preserved on second-century AD papyri from Egypt. Several shorter pieces also survive in quotations by ancient grammarians, focusing on local Boeotian legends.

The *Suda*, the tenth-century encyclopaedia, records that Corinna was the daughter of Acheloodorus and Procratia, and was nicknamed Myia (the fly). Another ancient tradition holds that she was a pupil of Myrtis of Anthedon. Some claim she competed with Pindar, defeating him in at least one poetry competition, with some sources claiming five victories against her great Theban rival.

Like Pindar, Corinna wrote choral lyric poetry, as demonstrated by her invocation of Terpsichore, the Muse of dance and chorus, in one of her fragments. According to the *Suda*, she wrote five books of poetry. Her works were collected in a Boeotian edition in the late third or early second century BC, and later Hellenistic and Roman texts of Corinna were derived from this manuscript. This Boeotian edition was produced in a scholarly format, with titles for the poems. It may have even included accent marks and hypotheses, though it was unlikely to have had line numbers.

Corinna composed in a literary dialect that had numerous aspects of her Boeotian vernacular, along with similarities to the language of epic poetry, both in morphology and in her choice of words. If Corinna was a contemporary of Pindar, this use of the local vernacular as a literary language is atypical for the time. On the other hand, if she lived during the Hellenistic period, parallels can be found in the poetry of Theocritus, who also used his native dialect in the *Idylls*.

About forty fragments of Corinna's poetry survive, more than any ancient woman poet except for Sappho, though no complete poems are known. The three most substantial fragments are preserved on pieces of papyrus discovered in Hermopolis and Oxyrhynchus in Egypt, dating to the second century AD; many of the shorter fragments survive in citations by grammarians interested in Corinna's Boeotian dialect. Two fragments of Corinna's poetry are preserved on the same papyrus (P. Berol. 13284), now in the collection of the Berlin State Museums. The first of these tells the story of a singing contest between the mountains Cithaeron and Helicon. The surviving section includes the ending of one of the mountain's songs, the gods voting on the winner of the contest and the losing mountain, Helicon, throwing down a boulder in anger.

The second poem preserved on this papyrus tells of the daughters of the river-god Asopus. It mostly consists of a prophet, Acraephen, telling Asopus how his daughters were abducted by the gods and that they will go on to give birth to many heroes. The papyrus ends with a highly fragmentary section, in which Asopus appears to be reconciled to his daughters' fate. The third substantial fragment is preserved on a

papyrus in the Sackler Library of the University of Oxford (P.Oxy. 2370) and invokes the muse of dance and choral poetry, Terpsichore. It is usually thought to be from a *partheneion*, a type of poem performed by a chorus of young women for a public occasion.

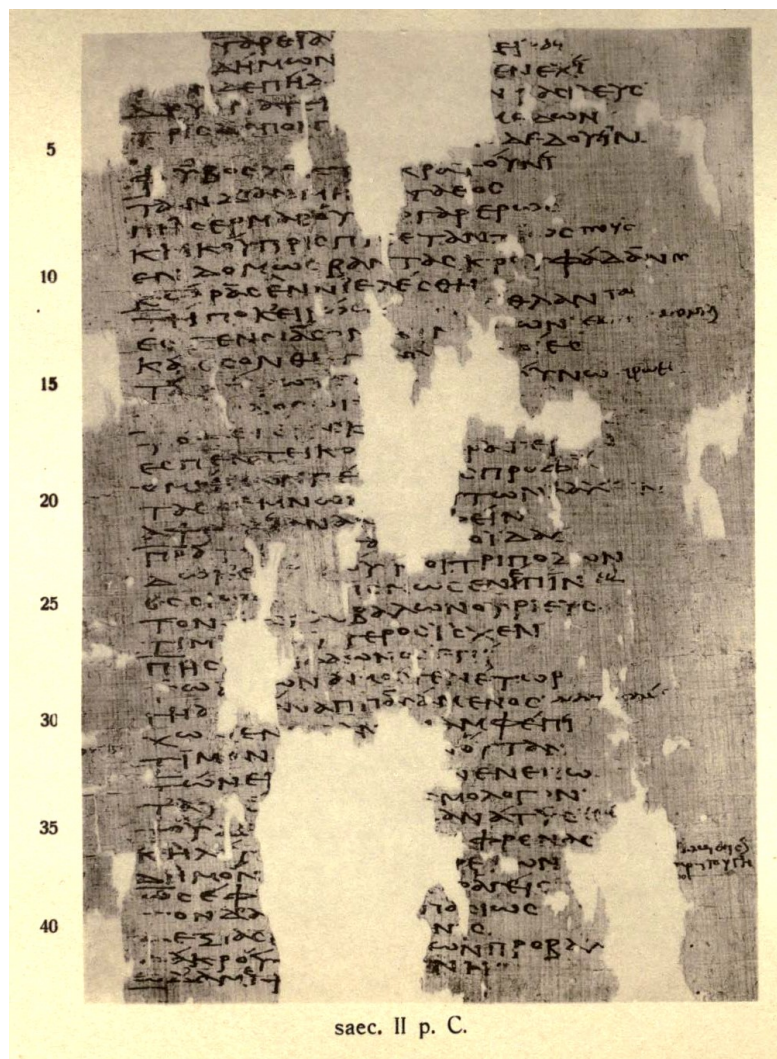
Corinna's use of language is concise, straightforward and generally undecorated, favouring simple metrical schemes. Her poetry focuses more on the narrative mode than on the intricate use of language. The employment of lyric poetry to tell mythic narratives is similar to that of the sixth century BC lyric poet Stesichorus. One particular difference between Corinna's verse and the serious tone of her Boeotian compatriot Pindar is her ironic and humorous approach. Also, Corinna's poetry is almost entirely concerned with mythology. According to a story recounted by Plutarch in *On the Glory of the Athenians*, she considered myth the proper subject for poetry, rebuking Pindar for not paying sufficient attention to it. Pindar was said to have responded to this criticism by filling his next ode with mythical allusions, causing Corinna to advise him, "Sow with the hand, not with the sack." Corinna's poetry concentrates on local legends, with poems about Orion, Oedipus and the famous Seven against Thebes.

The circumstances in which Corinna's poetry was performed remains much discussed among scholars. At least some of her poetry was likely performed for a mixed-gender audience, though some may have been intended for a specifically female audience. Some argue that her songs were composed for performance by a chorus of young girls in religious festivals and related to the ancient genre of *partheneia*. The poems may have been performed during cult celebrations in the places that appear in her poetry. Possible settings include the Mouseia at Thespiae and at the festival of the Daedala at Plataea.

Corinna was well-regarded by the people of her hometown Tanagra. Pausanias reports that there was a monument to her in the streets of the town and a painting of the poetess in the gymnasium. Tatian the Assyrian, a Christian writer and theologian of the second century, writes in his *Address to the Greeks* that the fourth century BC sculptor Silanion had produced a statue of her. In the early Roman Empire, Corinna's poetry was popular. The earliest mention of her work is by the first-century BC poet Antipater of Thessalonica, who includes her in his selection of nine "mortal muses". Ovid gives his lover the pseudonym Corinna in his *Amores*, usually believed to be a reference to the Tanagran poet. She is also named by Propertius as a model for Cynthia. She was also revered by Statius, as well as Callimachus, Lycophron and Sophron. Alexander Polyhistor wrote a commentary on her work, and she was named as a tenth canonical lyric poet in a scholion on Dionysius Thrax.



*Ancient marble sculpture of Corinna, possibly a copy of Silanion's bronze mentioned by Tatian,  
Museum of Compiègne*



Part of P. Berol. 13284, on which Corinna's poems on the "Contest of Helicon and Cithaeron" and the "Daughters of Asopus" are preserved

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*According to ancient tradition, Corinna was a pupil of Myrtis of Anthedon, with whom she sits in this painting by Ernst Stückelberg, 1897*



*'Corinna of Tanagra' by Frederic Leighton, c. 1893*

## FRAGMENTS CONCERNING THE LIFE OF CORINNA



Suidas *Lexicon*: Corinna: — Daughter of Achelodorus and Hippocrateia, of Thebes or of Tanagra; pupil of Myrtis; [nicknamed *Myia* 'Fly';] a lyric poetess. It is said that she was victorious five times over Pindar. She wrote five Books, and Inscriptions, and Lyric Nomes.

Plutarch *Glory of Athens*: When Pindar was as yet young, and prided himself overmuch on his command of language, Corinna censured his ill-taste because, though myths are the proper work of a poet, and forms of words, turns of phrase, changes of expression, tunes and rhythms mere embellishments, his poems were nevertheless devoid of them. Pindar took strong objection to her words and proceeded to compose the lyric which begins: 'Ismenus, or gold-distaffed Melia, or Cadmus, or the holy race of the Sown, or the doughty might of Heracles, or the cheerful worship of Dionysus...' [the stock themes of Theban mythology] and showed it Corinna. Whereupon she retorted, laughing, that he should sow with the hand and not with the whole sack. For Pindar had simply made mixed drinks of his myths and then poured them into his song.

Scholiast on Aristophanes *Acharnians*: 'Ἀγόραζειν: — to behave in the market-place with arrogance of manner and licence of speech; an Attic use of the word, for using which in Book I of his *Maiden-Songs* Corinna takes Pindar to task.

Aelian *Historical Miscellanies*: — When the poet Pindar competed at Thebes he happened on ignorant judges, and was defeated five times by Corinna. By way of exposing their lack of good taste, he called Corinna a sow.

Pausanias *Description of Greece*: Corinna, the only poet of Tanagra, is commemorated by a monument in the open street and by a painting in the gymnasium. The latter represents her in the act of putting on the headband she won when she defeated Pindar in the lyric competition at Thebes. In my opinion her victory may be set down first to her dialect, because she did not sing like Pindar in Doric, but in a dialect which Aeolians would understand, and secondly because, if one may really judge from the portrait, she was at that time a remarkably good-looking woman.

*Introduction to Pindar*: The names of the aforesaid lyric poets are these: — Alcman, Alcaeus, Sappho, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Anacreon, Simonides, Bacchylides and Pindar; [some authorities add to these Corinna].

Propertius *Elegies*: Nor is it so much her face, fair though it be, that hath taken me captive... 'tis rather when the melody begins of that Aeolian quill which can rival the lyre of Aganippe, 'tis when she pits her own poetry against old Corinna's, and deems Erinna's verse no match for what she writes herself.

Statius *Greenwoods* [to his father the schoolmaster]: Thou'rt skilled to expound the songs of the Battiad [Callimachus], or the secrets of the cramped Lycophron, Sophron's mazes or the meagre Corinna's mysteries.

# FRAGMENTS OF THE POEMS OF CORINNA





*End of Sample*