A prominent feature of archaic and classical Greek symposia was the singing of songs in elegiac meter, songs that often mentioned and sometimes debated the conventions of their sympotic location of performance and that occasionally declared, bewailed or reflected upon sexual desire, ἔρως. In the poems of the earliest generation of Hellenistic epigrammatists, Asclepiades, Callimachus, Hedylus and Posidippus, erotic and, rather less, sympotic themes are also prominent. Are the poems of the third-century poets lineal and (as it were) Darwinian descendants of elegy as sung between the seventh and the fifth centuries (as, for example, Reitzenstein argued), or are they the result of a conscious decision to create a new genre? Whatever answer is given, it can claim only probability, not certainty, since much is still debated about the performance and writing of epigram in the third century B.C., and even more remains obscure concerning the performance, writing down and collection of archaic and classical elegy, of which most survives only in fragments and in only a few cases can we be sure we have a complete poem.

Prima facie, however, the respects in which archaic and classical elegy differed from third-century epigram are numerous. For a start, before even the characteristics of early elegy are assessed, we must remember that elegiac poetry formed only a part, and perhaps in many cases a small part, of oral performances at symposia (to say nothing of other forms of musical, dancing and pantomimic diversion). Within the category of oral exchanges many will simply have been in (for the want

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1 For the Greek symposium see Murray (1983a), (1983b) and (1990); Vetta (1983).
3 The surviving texts of early Greek elegy are most conveniently found in Gerber (1999a). For the place of elegy in the symposium cf. West (1974), Bowie (1986) and (1990b).
of a better term) prose: story-telling, contributions to conversation and—perhaps rarely—more formal speeches. A symposiast who moved from prose to poetry or song had a number of choices, at least in Ionia or in cities whose sympotic culture had adopted Ionian fashions in song. Certainly in Paros, Thasos and Amorgos of the seventh century or in Ephesus and Samos of the sixth an Archilochus or Semonides, a Hipponax or an Anacreon could sing elegies or perform *iamboi* (perhaps in some sort of recitative), poems that might be in consecutive lines of iambic trimeters or trochaic tetrameters or might (in *Epodes*) combine these with other iambic or dactylic metrical units. It is clear that iambic trimeters or trochaic tetrameters were also available to sympotic poets in Athens of the early sixth century (Solon) and of the fifth century (Euenus, Hermippus): whether *Epodes* were still composed in the fifth century, or indeed ever, outside Paros, Thasos, Ephesus and Samos, is quite uncertain (though Diogenes Laertius 1.61 claims *Epodes* for Solon). As mention of Anacreon indicates, there was also a strong tradition of singing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument: that may have been the only mode of singing in Aeolic *symposia*, and it certainly flourished alongside performance of elegies and *iamboi* in many cities (e.g., Sparta, Athens, Thebes, Rhegion, Samos). A song-type prominent in Attic *symposia* but not unique to them was the *skolion*, a song in units of two or four-lines, in meters most of which are Aeolic, to the first verse of which others could be offered in reply or thematic variation.

This map (here much simplified) of the complex sympotic culture of oral performance in the archaic and classical periods is likely to have been known (in greater detail and with many more points of certainty) to all the third-century epigrammatists, as it must surely have been known to Callimachus. In choosing to write erotic and sympotic epigram exclusively (or almost exclusively) in elegiac couplets these poets

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4 Bowie (1994).

5 It may be relevant for assessment of Hellenistic epigrams in mixed meters that archaic inscribed epigrams also combined different metrical units, cf. Friedländer and Hoffleit (1948) nos. 155–79 and Page (1976).

6 The surviving pieces of Greek lyric poetry, including Attic *skolia*, are most conveniently found in Campbell (1982–93).

7 For Callimachus, cf. especially fr. 178 Pf. For Hellenistic awareness of *skolia* cf. the *skolia* attributed to the Seven Sages by Diogenes Laertius 1.34, 61, 71, 78, 85 and 91 (= SH 521–6). For the problem of the continuity of sympotic culture cf. Murray (1996: esp. 23).