

Classic Poetry Series

Simonides
- poems -

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Simonides(556 BC - 468 BC)

Simonides was a famous lyric poet from the city of Iulis, in the island of Ceos, off the coast of Attica. He left his native island in his youth and went to Athens, where he spent the largest part of his life. He probably also spent some time at the court of Hieron, the tyrant of Syracuse, where he may have met with Pindar. He was probably the first to write victory odes for winners at the Olympic games, a genre in which Pindar would later become most famous.

In Athens he became famous for celebrating the heroes and battles against the Persians. He is said to have written some of the epigrams that were put on plaques at Thermopyle in memorandum of the great battle between the Greeks and the Persians. One of them said "Here fought once against three million barbarians, four thousand Peloponnesian men."

He also excelled at elegies, his genius was inclined to the pathetic, and none could touch with truer effect the chords of human sympathy.

Little is left of his works, of which only fragments are extant.

Epitaph At Thermopylae

Four thousand of us fought three million.
When you visit Sparta, tell them:
Here, the soldiers kept their word.

Simonides

Fragment 01

WHEN, upon the well-wrought chest,
Fiercely heat the howling wind,
And the oceans heaving breast
Filled with terror DanaCs mind ;
All in tears, her arm she throws
Over Perseus, as he lay
O, my babe, she said, what woes
On thy mothers bosom weigh!

Thou dost sleep with careless breast,
Slumbering in this dreary home,
Thou dost sweetly take thy rest,
In the darkness and the gloom.

In thy little mantle there,
Passing wave thou dost not mind,
Dashing oer thy clustering hair,
Nor fhe voices of the wind.

Yet if thou, my beauteous one!
Felt the weight of this deep woe,
Not unconscious would my son
Hear his mothers sorrows now.

Yet sleep on, my babe, I pray,
Sleep thou too, tumultuous deep
And th unmeasured cares that stay
On my heart,let them too sleep!

Father Jove! I ask of thee,
Vain their evil counsels make!
And, though bold the prayer may be,
Right my wrongs, for Perseus sake.

Simonides