

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Stesichorus**

## **- poems -**

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## Stesichorus(640 BC - 555 BC)

Stesichorus was a lyric poet from Himera, who lived during the first half of the 6th century BC. The name Stesichorus actually means "Chorus Master", so it might have been a title and not a name. His real name is possibly Tisias.

Stesichorus was very creative and prolific, and is considered the first literary celebrity in Greece. He influenced many poets with his long, narrative poems with mythological themes. Not much of his work has survived, but we know that he wrote in the Doric dialect, and that he was inspired by Homer. He wrote *The Wooden Horse*, *The Capture of Troy*, *Homecoming* and *Oresteia*.

It is told in history that he warned his fellow-citizens against Phalaris, whom they had chosen as their general, by relating to them the well-known fable of the horse, which, in its eagerness to punish the stag for intruding upon its pastures, became the slave of man (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ii. 20). But his warnings had no effect; he himself was obliged to flee to Catana, where he died and was buried before the gate called after him the Stesichorean. The story that he was struck blind for slandering Helen in a poem and afterwards recovered his sight when, in consequence of a dream, he had composed a palinode or recantation (in which he declared that only Helens phantom had been carried off to Troy), is told by Plato, Pausanias, and others.

There only remains about thirty fragments of his poems, none of them longer than six lines. Stesichorus indeed made a new departure by using lyric poetry to celebrate gods and heroes rather than human feelings and passions. Several of his poems sung of the adventures of Heracles; one dealt with the siege of Thebes, another with the sack of Troy. The popular legends of Sicily also inspired his muse; he was the first to introduce the shepherd Daphnis who came to a miserable end after he had proved faithless to the nymph who loved him. He was famed in antiquity for the richness and splendour of his imagination and his style.

# Season Of Song

Forget the wars.  
It is time to sing.  
Take out the flute from Phrygia  
and recall the songs of our blond Graces.

Clamor of babbling swallows:  
it is already spring.

Stesichorus