



## ПРАВА И ОБЯЗАННОСТИ ГРАЖДАНИНА RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF CITIZENS

DOI: 10.22363/2312-8127-2023-15-3-301-308


EDN: UFSEWJ

Research article / Научная статья

### Alkaios — a true citizen of Mytilene

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the civic position and political views of Alkaios, a fighter against tyranny, and his opponent Pittacus, the tyrant of Mytilene. The purpose of the study is to identify the presence or absence of political differences between Alkaios and Pittacus based on an analysis of all available sources. The author proves that the political views of Alkaios and Pittacus coincided and did not change throughout the entire period of their joint actions. According to the author, the situation changed due to the role of Pittacus in the victorious end of the first stage of the Sigeian War. Conclusions: Pittak decided to seize power by changing allies. Having established tyranny, he did not radically reform the state system, supplementing the traditional regime with personal authoritarian power.

**Keywords:** Pittacus, heteria, political views, political struggle, aristocracy, tyranny, Sigei, Archaeanactides

**Article history:** Received: 28.02.2023. Accepted: 17.04.2023.

**For citation:** Solomatina EI. Alkaios — a true citizen of Mytilene. *RUDN Journal of World History*. 2023;15(3):301–308. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8127-2023-15-3-301-308>

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## Алкей — истинный гражданин Митилены

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**Аннотация.** Исследование посвящено гражданской позиции и политическим взглядам Алкея, борца с тиранией, и его оппонента Питтака, тирана Митилены. Цель исследования — на основе анализа всех имеющихся источников выявить наличие или отсутствие политических разногласий у Алкея и Питтака. Автор доказывает, что политические взгляды Алкея и Питтака совпадали и не менялись на протяжении всего периода их совместных действий. По мнению автора, ситуация изменилась в связи с ролью Питтака в победоносном завершении первого этапа Сигейской войны. Питтак решил, сменив союзников, захватить власть. Установив тиранию, он не стал радикально реформировать государственный строй, дополнив традиционный режим личной авторитарной властью.

**Ключевые слова:** Питтак, гетерия, политические взгляды, политическая борьба, аристократия, тирания, Сигей, Археанактиды

**История статьи:** Поступила в редакцию: 28.02.2023. Принята к публикации: 17.04.2023.

**Для цитирования:** Соломатина Е.И. Алкей — истинный гражданин Митилены // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Всеобщая история. 2023. Т. 15. № 3. С. 301–308. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8127-2023-15-3-301-308>

### Introduction

According to the established tradition, the civic position and political views of one of the famous lyric poets of antiquity — Alkaios and the *hetaireia* which he belonged to, are usually assessed in comparison with the views of his political opponent Pittakos, who won the long struggle for power in Mytilene. This assessment was significantly influenced by the modern researchers understanding of the essence of the regime of sole power established by Pittakos. Following Aristotle, who called it *aisymneteia* and equated it with elective tyranny, the researchers see the essence of *aisymneteia*, as well as tyranny, in their anti-aristocratic orientation. With such a vision of the political regime established by Pittakos, it was self-evident that Alkaios, speaking out against tyranny, was not on the side of the progressive development of society in the direction of its democratization, but on the side of the obsolete aristocracy and its values. However, ideas about the essence of archaic tyranny are constantly being refined and modernized in connection with a deepening understanding of the level of political development of the Greek polis in the 7th century BC. This, in turn, actualized the issue of revising the assessment of the civic position of Alkaios and his opponent.

### Political events where Alcaeus participated with Pittacus

In the second half of the 7th — early 6th cent. BC. Mytilene was engulfed in internecine strife of striving for power representatives of the aristocratic elite. Many of these dramatic events became known due to the fact that they were reflected in the poems of Alkaios who from a young age was involved in political struggle. It is no coincidence that Alkaios gained a reputation as a political poet, witness and singer of civil strife, which is also confirmed by external evidence about his life, in which he is mentioned in connection with various episodes of the struggle for power of political groups and their leaders (Strab. XIII.2.3; Diog. Laert. I.74–81).

Horace calls “citizen of Lesbos” Alkaios “fierce in war”, singing love and wine “between battles” (Hor. Carm. I.32.5–9). Even in antiquity, Alkaios poems on political topics were characterized as songs of unrest — *stasiotica* (Strab. XIII.2.3) and as civil ones (Dionys. Hal. De imit. II.8). Alkaios songs were performed at symposiums — feasts of aristocrats, those who were like-minded poet. In the political poems of Alcaeus, there is no consistent and coherent presentation of events, they reflect the reaction of the poet to them. It is quite obvious that the events were well known to the listeners, because they were, mostly, accomplices in these events. However, for modern researchers of the political history of Mytilene, the sequence and chronology of the events mentioned in the lyrics are not always clear, which allows the existence of various versions of their reconstructions and interpretations.

For the disclosure of the topic of investigation, the political events in which Alkaios took part together with Pittakos and which were reflected in his works spark interest.

At some point, the exact date is not known, the royal power in Mytilene was replaced by the rule of members of the former royal family of Penthilidae. The Penthilidae, having monopolized power in their hands, removed other noble families from government. Approximately in the middle of the 7th cent. BC [1. C. 41; 2. P. 135; 3. P. 92] the reign of the Penthilidae came to an end: by their permissiveness they incurred the wrath of the nobility. Aristotle cites this event as an example of an upheaval caused by the violent behavior of rulers (Arist. Pol. V.8.13, 1311b). As a result of the destruction of the monopoly rule of the Penthilidae, other aristocratic families also gained access to power, which became possible due to the existence of the eponymous office of prytanis and the college of basileis [4. C. 274; 6. P. 30].

The existence of other polis authorities in Mytilene — a council, the membership of which was hereditary, and a people’s assembly (agora), is mentioned by Alkaios (fr. 130 Voigt) [5]. Further developments showed that the presence of annually changing offices could not prevent the desires of rival factions to take a leading position in the polis, so the discord between them continued. The Archaeanaetidae, Cleanactidae and the group, which included Alkaios’s brothers and Pittakos, stood out in particular. At this stage, aristocratic groups no longer fought for participation in government, but for sole power — monarchy, as Alkaios calls it (fr. 6.27 Voigt) [5], or tyranny,

as it is defined in later written sources (Diog. Laert. I.74; Strab. XIII.2.3). A certain Melanchros took advantage of the fruits of the struggle. His name occurs only once in a fragment of Alkaios (fr. 331 Voigt) [5]. Despite the absence of any characteristics of his reign in the sources, it was believed that Melanchros was a representative of the demos, a democratic leader who established the first of the tyrannical regimes in Mytilene, mentioned by ancient tradition [6. C. 36; about relying on the demos, especially on the Thracians, see: 7. P. 14]. The stage of the struggle itself was regarded as a period of activation of the upper layer of the demos, to which Pittakos is attributed. The temporary union of Pittakos and Alkaios *hetaireia*, with all the allowable differences in fundamental interests, was explained by the presence of a common enemy — a tyrant [6. C. 35]. In fact, we know nothing about the role of the people, and nothing indicates that Melanchros came to power as the leader of the lower layers of society. Most likely, it was an episode of the internecine struggle of the Mytilenean aristocrats, since both Melanchros and his opponents relied on aristocratic *hetaireiai* [8. C. 118]. Melanchros was overthrown in the 42nd Olympiad (Suda s.v. Πυττάκος), 612/9 BC [9. C. 247] by the joint efforts of Alkaios's brothers and Pittakos (Diog. Laert. I.74). The poet himself is not mentioned among the participants in the conspiracy. The researchers explain this circumstance based on the interpretation of one song of Alkaios (fr. 75 Voigt) [5], in which, presumably, the poet recalls some event involving Pittakos and talks about his young age. This event is usually identified with the murder of Melanchros, and presumably the too young age of Alkaios was the reason for his non-participation in it [10. C. 152; 3. P. 93]. However, sometimes the line of Alkaios about his infancy is neglected as untrue, because on the basis of other evidence, one can calculate the age of the poet, who at that moment was not so young [9. C. 250]. Accordingly, the participation of Alkaios is admitted in a conspiracy against Melanchros on the basis of Strabo's indirect data (Strab. XIII.2.3), which is preferred [6. C. 36]. Despite the decisive role in the elimination of Melanchros, none of the Alkaios–Pittakos's *hetaireia* came to power as a result of the coup.

Myrsilos became the next sole ruler. Due to the lack of evidence, it is not known for certain whether he came to power immediately or after a certain period of time after the overthrow of Melanchros. Presumably, after the assassination of Melanchros and the ensuing riots, Pittakos, together with the brothers of Alkaios, restored the rule of a broad coalition of elites in Mytilene [1. P. 42–43], in which Pittacus played a leading role [8. C. 118]. Myrsilos, who may have belonged to the Cleanactidae [7. C. 15; 10. P. 174, note 4] and was on the side of Melanchros, first was expelled with his supporters while trying to seize power [1. C. 44]. The short-term period of the exile of Myrsilos was the result of successful joint actions of the Alkaios–Pittakos *hetaireia*. But soon Myrsilos returned to Mytilene [8. C. 118; 11. P. 168, note 21], at the same time, as follows from the poem of Alkaios (fr. 305 Voigt) [5], a certain Mnamon, a poet's friend, provided Myrsilos with a small boat for returning. With Myrsilos return to Mytilene, the strife between the factions flared up with

renewed vigor. Alkaios's *hetaireia* resumed its union with Pittakos, holding it off with an oath to fight with those in power [10. P. 161, 167, 176; 3. P. 93]. The conspirators vowed either to win or die, but not to retreat from the intended goal, as Alkaios says about this (fr. 129 Voigt) [5].

In addition to the struggle against those who sought to establish a monarchical rule in Mytilene, Alkaios and his *hetaireia* together with Pittakos participated in a foreign policy event — in the war against the Athenians for Sigeion. The earliest evidence about this conflict belongs to Alkaios (fr. 428 Voigt) [5], who described his first unsuccessful military experience in the song and sent it to his friend Melanippus to Mytilene (Herod. V.95; Strab. XIII.1.38). According to Strabo (XIII. 1.38), Pittakos, having sailed with ships to Sigion, fought with the Athenians for some time, poorly coping with business and suffer failures. The war took on a protracted character, turning into a series of skirmishes. The conflict was resolved by the duel of the two leaders — Phrynon and Pittakos. Pittakos killed Phrynon using a trick. Pittakos's victory over Phrynon completed the first stage of the war for Sigeion in favor of Mytilene and thereby made it possible for the grouping to return to its homeland with a triumph and continue the struggle for power. Pittakos significantly enhanced personal prestige among citizens of Mytilene and increased his own chances of success. It is no coincidence that some ancient authors believed that it was for the victory over Phrynon that Pittakos received power in Mytilene (Diog. Laert. I.75; Valer. Max. VI.5., ext. I).

Having returned to Mytilene Pittakos and Alkaios's *hetaireia* continued the joint struggle against Myrsilos, but their conspiracy was revealed, probably due to the betrayal of Pittakos, who at some point went over to the side of Myrsilos, for which the poet subsequently reproached the renegade (fr. 129 Voigt) [5] [10. P. 161, 167, 179; 3. P. 93; 11. P. 159]. The conspirators escaped severe punishment, having managed to hide in Pyrrha in time.

The failed conspiracy and the first expulsion that followed are usually dated to 600/599 BC [9. C. 253]. The betrayal of Pittakos was a turning point, dramatically changing the situation and the goals of former associates. Alkaios and his *hetaireia*, being in exile, are striving in every possible way to return to Mytilene and continue the fight against the ruler who seized power in the city. Pittakos on the contrary, demonstrates loyalty to the ruling Myrsilos, not preventing him from persecuting his former allies. The poem of Alkaios (fr. 70 Voigt) [5] is regarded as evidence that Myrsilos relied on the support of Pittakos [6. C. 36; 8. P. 119] or even shared power with him [12. P. XIX: the time of the alleged dual power dates from the period between 600/599 and 597/596 BC].

The duration of Myrsilos's reign is unknown, most likely he died before Pittakos was put in power [10. C. 179]. Alkaios greeted Myrsilos's death with jubilation, urging everyone to drink on this occasion (fr. 332 Voigt) [5]. After the death of Myrsilos, Alkaios and his associates returned from exile to their homeland [3. C. 93; 11. P. 166; 6. P. 40; 8. P. 119].

Once in Mytilene, they discovered that Pittakos had begun to seize power in the city. Alkaios and his brother Antimenidas again embarked on the path of conspiracy and struggle, now against Pittakos. Alkaios is trying with all his might to warn his fellow citizens against a new danger in the person of Pittakos, who is encroaching on tyranny (fr. 141 Voigt) [5], and calls for an end to discord among the aristocracy (fr. 70 Voigt) [5]. Alkaios's warnings do not reach the goal, the aristocracy is divided and weakened by civil strife [11. C. 175], Pittakos moves further along the path of achieving power. To strengthen his position, he marries a representative of the royal family. His marriage contributed to the establishment of relations with the Pentilidai after the dissolution of the alliance with the clan of the deceased ruler [11. P. 156–157, note 3].

The soon-to-be-followed “general approval” by the Mytileneans of the establishment of the tyranny of Pittakos (Alc. fr. 348 Voigt) [5] is associated with two events that could serve as a reason for this. The first event was the strengthening of Alkaios's *hetaireia* during a three-year stay in Mytilene to such an extent that it began to pose a threat to society. It was in response to this threat that the was established in 597/96 BC [9. C. 253; 12. P. XVIII], and the rebels found themselves again in exile where the Cleanaktidai and Sappho also went. The second event is the threat of an assault on Mytilene by a rebel army. Forced to leave Mytilene Alkaios's *hetaireia* did not reconcile itself to the position of the exiles and continued fighting. The second exile is sometimes associated with the unpatriotic act of Alcaeus (fr. 69 Voigt) [5], who allegedly turned to Lydia for help [3. C. 93]. This is the most common version of the reconstruction of the events reflected in fragment 69, but not the only one [11. P. 164–165]. Having received the money from Lydia, the exiles equipped an army and tried to take Mytilene by storm. Regardless of what event (it is impossible to determine exactly because of the state of the sources) caused the establishment of the tyranny of Pittakos, it was with it that Alkaios went into an open military clash. Alkaios (fr. 306Ae Voigt) [5] reports about the “battle at the bridge”, in which the rebels were defeated. This last stage of the struggle between Alkaios's *hetaireia* and Pittakos ended in favor of the latter. However, when Pittakos gained power, he did not make any radical reform of the state system (Arist. Pol. II.9.9, p. 1274b 15–20), as one would expect from a tyrant, based on traditional ideas about tyranny. The bodies of polis self-government mentioned by Alkaios: the council, the people's assembly that operated in his time, as well as the highest magistrate of the prytanis, continued to operate further, they are also mentioned in inscriptions of the 4th century BC [10. P. 177, note 1].

## Conclusion

The civic stance and political views of any group leader can manifest themselves either in a put forward political program or in active political actions. Since the archaic period did not know the struggle of political programs, the struggle was carried



out on a personal level, and the most effective measure was the destruction of the enemy [13. P. 118–119]. We have analyzed the events in which Alkaios and Pittakos participated in order to compare their political views. It can be seen that at almost all stages of the struggle they acted together, their methods and goals were the same and unchanged — to overthrow the one who was currently in power. The goal of seizing power themselves was clearly implied, but for some reason they were not able to carry it out for the time being, only Pittakos succeeded in this later. The goal of coming to power themselves did not contradict the general tasks of the struggle, since they fought against a specific person, and not against the very form of power. There is no need to talk about the participation or involvement of the demos, or rather its top, since politics in the early polis, which was an oligarchy, would remain essentially an elite preserve [14. P. 178–180, 189]. Accordingly, it makes no sense to give opposite assessments of the political position of those who opposed tyranny (i.e., allegedly defended aristocratic ideals), and those who are for its establishment (i.e., allegedly for the democratization of society, for anti-aristocratic orders) does not make sense. After all, tyranny was neither an alternative nor a threat to the existing oligarchies in which it flourished. Violence was not used against the existing order, but only against competitors. Tyranny throughout almost the entire archaic era was not at all some kind of special regime, but was a traditional leadership in its most amplified form [14. P. 198, 202].

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