

A. Anonymi

1. Atthis Epitaph

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In 1858, a British archaeological expedition arrived at the ruins of Cnidus, the double-harbored city that had stood on the western coast of what is today Turkey's Datça Peninsula, just south across the gulf from Halicarnassus. Among the many inscriptions collected and transcribed by the team was this twenty-line epitaph for a woman named Atthis, from a marble slab (25" × 25.5" × 4.5") that had been reused as part of the pavement of an early Christian church. The poem is in elegiac verse, the standard meter for ancient epitaphs, and is divided on the stone into four stanzas: in the first two, Atthis' husband, Theios, laments his deceased wife; in the third, Atthis responds to Theios from Hades; in the fourth, Theios speaks again, this time presumably to the passerby.

On the basis of its language and letterforms, the inscription has been dated to the second or early first century BCE, making it one of the earliest attestations both of stanzaic division on stone and of *eisthesis* (indentation) of the second, pentameter line of each elegiac couplet. The poem is also striking for its metrical precision (on many counts, its hexameters are in alignment with an Alexandrian metrical aesthetic) and for its dialectal variation: stanzas 1 and 3 use Ionic forms, while stanzas 2 and 4 have a Doric coloring. It was not uncommon for Hellenistic epitaphs to mix these two dialects (cf. *IMEGR* 5, 33, and 35, all from Egypt), but in this case it is notable that the Greek spoken in Cnidus (a Dorian foundation) was the Doric koine. The poet's decision to portray Atthis' speech as markedly Ionic may have been partially inspired by the language of the dead in the Homeric portrayals of the underworld. The stylistic refinement of the epitaph and the probable literary influences on its poetics thus further serve to illustrate the difficulty of drawing clear-cut distinctions between inscribed and "book" epigram. The inscription is also likely to be an important witness to the relationship between Greek and Latin elegy (cf. especially Propertius 4.7 and 4.11).

Another noteworthy feature of the poem is the way in which husband

and wife seem to have sought out different sources of consolation in the wake of Atthis' death. Theios, whose lines make use of a number of sepulchral commonplaces, constructs his grief along a more "archaic" model, taking solace in the physical structure of the tomb and its function as an eternal monument to his wife's chastity. When he pronounces his resolution to go on living (in the last two lines of the epitaph), he maintains that his only motivation for doing so is the little child whom Atthis has left behind (lines 5 and 18). Atthis claims to be comforted by the fact that she has refused to drink from the river Lethe and so still retains the memory of her husband "even among the dead" (line 12). The epitaph marks the first known reference to someone refusing to drink from the Lethe so as to preserve a personal memory, rather than to remember a mystery cult's directives for securing an elite place in the afterlife.

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GREEK TEXT

Λαίνα σοι τύμβων δωμήματα Θεῖος ἔτευξα,
 Ἄτθις, ὁ δις τῆς σῆς ἡλικίης προγέρων,
 εὐξάμενος χειρῶν ἀπὸ σῶν κόνιν· ἄκριτε δαῖμον,
 ἀμφοτέροις ἡμῖν ἔσβεσας ἠέλιον.

Ἄτθις, ἐμοὶ ζήσασα καὶ εἰς ἐμὲ πνεῦμα λιποῦσα, 5
 ὡς πάρος εὐφροσύνης νῦν δακρύων πρόφασι,
 ἀγνά, πουλυγόητε, τί πένθιμον ὕπνον ἰαύεις,
 ἀνδρὸς ἀπὸ στέρνων οὔποτε θεῖσα κάρα,
 Θεῖον ἐρημώσασα τὸν οὐκέτι; σοὶ γὰρ ἐς Ἄϊδαν
 ἦλθον ὁμοῦ ζωᾶς ἐλπίδες ἀμετέρας. 10

οὐκ ἔπιον Λήθης Ἰδωνίδος ἔσχατον ὕδωρ,
 ὡς σε παρηγορίην κὰν φθιμένοισιν ἔχω,

Θεῖε, πλέον δύστηνε, γάμων ὅτι τῶν ἀμιάντων
νοσησθεῖς κλαίεις χηροσύνην θαλάμων.

τοῦτο σαοφροσύνας γέρας Ἀτθίδι τᾶ πολυκλαύτω 15
οὐκ ἴσον οὐδὲ ἀρετᾶς ἄξιον, ἀλλ' ἐθέμαν
μνάμαν εἰς αἰῶνα φερώνυμον, αὐτὸς ἀνάγκα
Θεῖος νηπιάχῃ πνεῦμα χαριζόμενος.
οἴσω γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο χάριν σέο καὶ τὸν ἀπηνῆ
ᾄμμασι τοῖς στυγνοῖς ὄψομαι ἠέλιον. 20

TEXT SOURCE

SGO 01/01/07.

COMMENTARY

Theios Addresses Atthis at Her Graveside

1–10: Theios' address to Atthis shows many of the features of an orally delivered (and even sung) lament.

1 δωμήματα: < δώμημα (attested only in inscribed epitaphs), a “chamber.”

2 Ἀτθίς: Nominative for vocative. The more regular Ἄτθι (as at Sappho 49.1 and 131.1; AP 9.122.1) would produce an unwanted hiatus. Atthis' rare name raises the possibility that she had a connection to Attica.

ὁ δὶς τῆς σῆς ἡλικίης προγέρων: “Who is twice your age” (προγέρων = “older”).

3 εὐζάμενος χειρῶν ἀπὸ σῶν κόνιν: It is a commonplace of epitaph that the person burying the deceased had hoped to be buried by (to receive the “dust” from) the deceased.

ἄκριτε δαίμων: An apostrophe of the daimon responsible for the death is another topos of sepulchral poetry.

4 ἠέλιον: ἠέλιος is the epic/Homeric form of ἥλιος. On the sun, sunlight, and light as metonymies for life in sepulchral epigram, see Tsagalis 63–86.

5 εἰς ἐμὲ πνεῦμα λιποῦσα: The notion of leaving one's “life breath” (πνεῦμα βίου) behind is common in epitaph, but the image of leaving a life breath

behind for someone—i.e., to “bequeath” a life to the bereaved—is unusual (on this use of λείπω, see LSJ A I 2 a, “leave as a legacy”). The πνεῦμα to which Atthis refers here may even be a metonymy for her child, which would further suggest the possibility that she died in childbirth.

6 πρόφασι: Vocative of πρόφασις, here “source” or “cause.”

7 πολυλόγητε: Vocative of *πολυλόγητος, attested only here. γόος = “lament”; thus πολυλόγητος would mean “much lamented” (cf. 15 πολυκλαύτω).

τί πένθιμον ὕπνον ιαύεις: An adjective + ὕπνον + a form of ιαύω (to “sleep,” “pass the night”) is a common formulation in both the Homeric *Hymns* (e.g., *HHApfr.* 177; *HHHermes* 289) and Hellenistic poetry (e.g., Callim. *Aitia* fr. 75.2 Pf.; Posidippus 100.1 A–B; Theocr. 3.49).

8 ἀνδρὸς ἀπὸ στέρνων οὔποτε θεῖσα κάρα: Cf. Catullus 3.8, of Lesbia’s sparrow: *nec sese a gremio illius mouebat*.

9 Θεῖον . . . τὸν οὐκέτι: “Theios, who exists no longer.”

10: The line is heavily Doric: ζωᾶς (ζωῆς); ἀμετέρας (ἡμετέρης), here a poetic plural.

Atthis Addresses Theios from Hades

11 Λήθης: Partitive genitive with πίνω, as usual. The Lethe is Hades’ “river of forgetfulness” (~ λήθω/λανθάνω).

Ἄιδωνίδος: < *Ἄιδωνίς, “daughter of Hades.”

ἔσχατον ὕδωρ: The “final water” or “furthest water.” The phrase appears elsewhere only in the late *Orphic Argonautica* (1104).

12 παρηγορίην: Predicate of σε, “as (a) consolation,” a very early occurrence of this meaning.

14 νοσφισθεῖς: < νοσφίζομαι, to “be deprived of” or “be robbed of” something.

Theios Addresses the Passerby

15 σαοφροσύνας γέρας: The “due of [Atthis’] chastity,” i.e., that which her fidelity deserves. The word γέρας here marks another instance of Theios’