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TEXTUAL NOTES ON EPITAPHS

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1. Rhodes

A gravestone on Rhodes, of late Hellenistic date, describes the deceased as “pitiful” or “merciful” (Maiuri, *Nuova silloge* no. 110):

Ἡράκλειτε
Ἄρτέμ[ω]νος
ἐλεήμων
χάϊρε.

The adjective ἐλεήμων is jarring. The epithet has puzzled its several readers, Tod finding its presence “rare but significant”, Fraser “certainly surprising” and apparently unexampled.¹ Fraser noted its application to gods. But that too is rare. On Rhodes itself, a priest had occasion to glorify in verse the “divine pity” of Athena Lindia (ἀεξῆσαι τὴν ἱερὴν ἐλέην, *IG XII.1* 783; II A.D.). Hesychius had read that there was an Aphrodite Eleemon.² In Ptolemaic Egypt we find Isis addressed as “merciful” in a hymn;³ and in Alexandria a street was named for Arsinoe Eleemon (*P. Lond.* VII 1986.13).

In the third century A.D. a man at Aezani “pitied for all his sufferings” prayed to the most high god (ἐλεηθεὶς ἀπ’ ὄλλων τῶν παθημάτων);⁴ likewise a woman of Ephesus prayed to the most high god and was pitied (εὐ[ξ]αμένη καὶ ἐλ[εη]θῆσα ἀνέθη[κεν]).⁵ But pity is not a theme where we might most expect it, in the “confession inscriptions” of Imperial date in Anatolia.⁶

Interestingly, one might anticipate pity from one’s guardian spirit (ἐλεήσας, *Pl. Leg.* 877a). And later, those in distress could hope for pity from the emperor (ἐλεηθέντες διὰ τὴν θεϊὰν πρόνοιαν, *IGBulg IV* 2236.95; A.D. 238).

So much for gods. In gravestones we hear often of the absence of pity, for Death did not pity (e.g. Ἄϊδη ... οὐκ ἐλεήσας, Peek, *GV* 1590; ὁ δαίμων μὴδ’ ἐλεήσας σου γονέας, Merkelbach/Stauber, *Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 06/02/31). But human beings who pity are the living, not the dead. In a poem from Cius, for example, the passer-by should have pity for a young girl dead (μ’ ἐλέησον, *I. Kios* 80); also for a young man from Amphipolis (*SEG XXXV* 708). And so the deceased is commonly “pitiable”; ἐλεεινός is a poetic word, usually of women and children,⁷ or of their surviving parents.⁸ But the passive ἐλεεινός is not ἐλεήμων.

In short, pity is not a trait of the dead, being entirely inappropriate to them – they have not the power to express it. Nor is it praised in the living, but rather requested: an epitaph, if it is sufficiently

¹ M. Tod, *BSA* 46 (1951) 189; P. M. Fraser, *Rhodian Funerary Monuments* (Oxford 1977) p. 72, citing Aphrodite and Arsinoe.

² ε1966, “in Cyprus and the territory of Calchedon (or Carthage)”. Cf. Jessen, “Eleemon”, *RE* 5 (1905) 2248.

³ Ἴσι ἐλήμων: V. F. Vanderlip, *The Four Greek Hymns of Isidorus* (Toronto 1972) no. 3.34 (E. Bernand, *I. métr. d’Eg.* no. 175.III).

⁴ T. Drew-Bear, *ANRW* II.18.3 (1990) 2039-40 no. 33.

⁵ R. Merkelbach, *Epigr. Anat.* 20 (1992) 55 with pl. I.4.

⁶ G. Petzl, *Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens* (*Epigr. Anat.* 22 [1994]); but see Petzl’s remarks p. 113 for a possible exception.

⁷ E.g. *IGBulg III* 1022 (Philippopolis); *Stud. Pont.* III 273 (πᾶσι ἐλεεινοτάτη); *SEG XXXII* 323 (Athens: παῖδα πατὴρ ἐ[λεεινὸν] θάψη).

⁸ Of the mother, *GV* 1505 = *SEG XI* 1139 (Aliphera); of the parents, *MAMA X* 219 (Appia: ἐλεεινοτάτους); of the house, *IG XII.5* 302 (Paros: δόμους ἐλεεινούς); of the owner of the deceased dog, *IGUrbRom III* 1230 (ἐλεεινὸν δακρύει).

poetic and detailed, may urge that the dead, or the bereaved, deserve the pity of the living. This is where the reader of a gravestone expected to find talk of pity. Such is not the epitaph of the Rhodian.

Of the third letter of ἐλεήμων Maiuri claimed to see only traces. I suggest that we should be suspicious not only of that letter, but of the first as well. Instead of Maiuri's ΕΛΗΜΩΝ, read, or correct to, the word that we expect here: τλήμων. This banality for the dead is in fact not much seen in Rhodian epitaphs, but we do have from about this date the epigram of a Rhodian child struck and killed by a wagon: κάθθανα τλήμων.⁹

2. Aphrodisias

A funerary epigram at Aphrodisias tells of Zenobius son of Zenon, who died young, leaving behind a wife; his death also left grief to his sisters and his mother; his brothers buried him, a sorrow for his city.¹⁰ The editor reckons the script to be late Hellenistic, an early text for Aphrodisias. A prose headline above the poem names the father and mother:

Ζήνων Ἀρτεμιδώρου ἱερεὺς Διὸς Γονέων
Ὀδατις Διονυσίου, γυνὴ δὲ Ζήνωνος

They seem to be still alive, for these lines were written by the same hand as the funerary epigram, which concerns the son alone: evidently they erected this tomb for him. Giving his priesthood as an identity, and of a native Carian cult, Zenon may hold this position by inheritance; for he was named for his god. His wife's name is Iranian. Both can be supposed to be survivors of old elites, Carian and Achaemenid, in the new Greek city Aphrodisias.

The first couplet of the poem gives the names of Zenobius and his father. The second begins the account of his death and its consequences: "At twenty-five he descended to the house of Acheron, leaving in the bed-chamber a care-worn wife."¹¹ Zenobius left to his sisters twin pains and to his mother tears; evidently his brothers buried him (7–10):

δισσὰ δὲ ἄλγη ἔλειπε κασιγνήταισι φίλαισιν,
μητρὶ δὲ δειλαίῃ δάκρυ(α) καὶ στεναχάς.
γίτονα δ' αὐτὸν ἔθεντο κασίγνητοι, μέγα πῆμα,
πατρίδι δ' οὐκ ὀλίγον πένθος ἐνεγκάμενον.

"But he left twin (?) griefs to his dear sisters, and to his unhappy mother tears and groans. Near (?) [to his mother, sc.] did his brothers lay him, a great grief, and bringing no small mourning to his city." So Jones translated, tentatively, stressing that γείτων is a problem: near to whom? Indeed, αὐτόν makes the missing referent all the more emphatic: himself as opposed to whom? The mother is admittedly the most recent person mentioned, but still the thought is incomplete as a Greek sentence. The mother, moreover, cannot easily be left to lament with the sisters if she were dead and buried nearby. And there is the further oddity that, despite the preceding roster of parents, widow, and sisters, only the brothers are said

⁹ Maiuri, *NS* 48 [GV 1625]. Traffic fatalities of the young, including this one, are discussed by L. Robert, *Hellenica* X (1955) 276–282, to which can be added Buecheler, *Carm. epigr.* 457 (aged nine), 1059 (a *parvulus*); Daux, *BCH* 94 (1970) 609–618 (a pig, but νέος).

¹⁰ C. P. Jones, *Arch. Anz.* 1994, 455–461, with valuable commentary [SEG XLIV 865; *Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 02/09/33]. In the *envoi* (verse 11) the wayfarer is invited to pause and shed a tear: ἀλλά γ' ὁδοιπορίην στήσας, ξένε (κτλ.). Jones remarked on the rarity of ἀλλά γε, and indeed it would seem inappropriate here. Better instead the phrase common in closing imperatives, ἀλλ' ἄγ'.

¹¹ λείπων ἐν θαλάμῳ R. A. Tybout (SEG): ἔνθα Λαμῶ Jones. To Tybout's parallels add *Anth. Gr.* 7.331, GV 475, 1119 (*Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 03/03/01), *I. Syrie* III 944. The poem is thus consistent in giving a name only to the deceased and describing the survivors only in terms of their bereavement.

to bury Zenobius, which if taken literally would imply a surprising exclusion of the rest of the family from the rite.¹² Finally, one expects the poem to offer an explanation of the twin griefs evoked in line 7.

I suggest that these several puzzles can find a common solution in one emendation, which assumes an easy error on the part of the mason, the confusion of I/Y or else of O/Ω: in line 9, γίτονα δ' ἀπὸν ἔθεντο κασιγνήτο(υ) or κασιγνήτ(ω)ι, “they buried him as a neighbor to his brother”.¹³ Here would be the referent that γείτων needs, and an explanation of the family’s twin griefs: they have already lost one son, and now a second.¹⁴ If this emendation is correct, then no one is excluded from the burial ceremony, for “they” who buried Zenobius are all the family members who have been listed to this point. To judge from that list, there are no sons remaining, and no grandchild: the male line is extinguished – a “great grief”. A fading aristocracy sees its hopes dashed.

3. Petra

Excavation at Petra in the 1950’s discovered a gravestone of late antiquity, the fourth or fifth century, which Stephen Tracy has now published.¹⁵ The stone contains an epigram, whose difficulties of meaning and meter the editor brought out clearly:

Ἄλφιοιο τὸ σῆμα
 ὃν εἵνεκεν
 εὐσεβιάων (*sic*)
 4 πέμψε θεὸς
 μετὰ πότμον ὄ-
 πη θ' ἔμεῖς εὐσεβ-
 έες. υἱοί.

Tracy translated: “Here is the memorial of Alphios whom after meeting his fate god conducted because of his reverential actions (?) where we also (if we are) reverent (shall go). His sons (set this up).” I believe that some of the obscurity of the text can be addressed by different punctuation.

The form εὐσεβιάων is not in fact a problem: such affectations of archaic dialect, in echo of epic, are a regular feature of late Greek verse; compare for example εὐεργεσιάων in an epigram from Aphrodisias of about A.D. 500.¹⁶ The rare plural “acts of piety” is found as early as the school of Aristotle, where it was contrived to achieve a parallel: οὐκ εἰκὸς τοὺς θεοὺς χαίρειν ταῖς δαπαναῖς τῶν θυομένων ἀλλὰ ταῖς εὐσεβείαις τῶν θυόντων (*Rh. Al.* 1423b28).¹⁷

The poem scans with near correctness if in line 2 we recognize the noun θέμις. Then punctuate:

Ἄλφιοιο τὸ σῆμα, ὃν εἵνεκεν εὐσεβιάων
 πέμψε Θεὸς μετὰ πότμον ὅπη θέμεις, εὐσεβέες υἱοί.

¹² Burial by brothers: e.g. *I. Rhod. Per.* 15 [*Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 01/03/01] from Loryma, [κεῖθι] κασίγνητοι θάψαμι πατρίοισι νόμοισιν], cf. 04/05/04, *I. chyp. syll.* 153 – expressly or presumably only if the parents were dead. By contrast *I. Smyrna* 518 [*Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* I 05/01/46] has burial by the children “as is proper” (παίδων σε φίλαι χέρες, ὡς θέμις ἐστίν, κρύψαν). Burial was conducted by the kin who were available.

¹³ In such texts γείτων normally takes the genitive: *Anth. Gr.* 7. 613 (applied to the dead), 456, 457 (applied to the tomb); at 8.155 the referent is unstated but is made unmistakable by context (“a friend of Gregory . . . therefore he also received a neighboring tomb”). Note in Aristophanes the invocation ὦ Λύκε, γείτων ἥρωος (*Vesp.* 389).

¹⁴ Compare Callim. *ep.* 20 (Pf.) of two deaths: δίδυμον δ' οἶκος ἐσεῖδε κακόν.

¹⁵ *Ann. Dept. Ant. Jord.* 43 (1999) 307–308 no. 2.

¹⁶ *Anth. Gr.* 16.35 [C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (Leeds 1989) no. 63].

¹⁷ The plurals at *IG XII.9* 13 (οὐνεκεν Εὐσεβειῶν etc.) are abetted by personification.

“His pious sons (set up) the tomb of Alpheios,¹⁸ whom for his acts of piety God upon his death sent to where it is right.” θέμις with no verb is perhaps better known in the negative, οὐ θέμις; but the positive is as old as Homer’s ἦ γὰρ θέμις (*Od.* 24.286). A reported Sibylline oracle prescribing cult usages has ὅπη θέμις as a tag (“as is right”): ἀρέσασθαι . . . θυέεσσιν, ὅπη θέμις.¹⁹ This is equivalent to the ὡς θέμις that was common in prose and verse (in an epigram, e.g. *Anth. Gr.* 6.4.8). For rightness of location as in the Petra epigram, there is Quintus Smyrn. 6.58: ἐν μέσσοισιν, ὅπη θέμις ἔστ’ ἀγορεύειν.

The poem has some common ground with a more ambitious epigram from Anatolia:²⁰ the tomb holds a husband and wife “who worshipped God chastely”, shared a common life in mutual affection, and died on the same day; “for them their son as a commemoration of piety engraved the stele” (τοῖς παῖς εὐσεβίης ἔνεκεν στηλῖδα (χ)αράξεν). There it is left ambiguous whether the piety is that of the parents or the son. At Petra the poet wishes more clearly to invoke the piety of both parties and in both its senses, in the first line the recent and unconventional sense of Christian acts of piety by the deceased, and in the second the old and traditional sense of children’s duty to parents, while yet hinting that they too are Christian.

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¹⁸ I do not see how to choose between Greek Alpheios and Roman Alfeius. The latter is unambiguous in e.g. *I. Ephesos* 2207A: Μάρκος Ἄλφιος Πρεῖμο[ς] Πρεῖμου, Μάρκος Ἄλφιος Υ[- -], Ἄλφια Τερ[- -], Ἄλφια [- -], cf. 2207 and 2207B.

¹⁹ Quoted by Phlegon *FGrHist* 257 F 37.V.4.10 and Zosimus 2.6.1; cf. H. Diels, *Sibyllinische Blätter* (Berlin 1890).

²⁰ *Stud.Pont.* III 91 (Kaibel, *Epigr.* 425; *Steinepigr. gr. Ost.* II 11/05/01).