

Andrzej Wypustek, *Images of Eternal Beauty in Funerary Verse Inscriptions of the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman Periods*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013. Pp. xii, 245. ISBN 9789004233188. \$133.00.

Readers may be forgiven for initially being confused by the title of this volume, for although “images of eternal beauty” play an implicit part throughout the whole book, the broader issue tackled here is the representation of continuing existence after death in Greek epigrams. It is only in the final chapters that “images of beauty” emerge clearly as the principal focus on the author’s thinking about the topic and as his answer to the basic dilemma confronted in the volume. Although much Greek funerary poetry represents death as an unhappy descent into the gloom of the Underworld, epitaphs of the Hellenistic and Roman periods sometimes imagine the deceased as a hero or a god, or as continuing to exist in a transformed, celestial form. The question of what if anything these poems have to say about a belief in life after death has been widely discussed, though largely in connection with specific mystery cults or belief systems. Wypustek’s contribution is “to examine those epigrams which while presenting some kind of a positive eschatology provide us with reasonably concrete information on the posthumous status of the deceased with regard to the gods but do not reflect the specific doctrines of any particular group of believers” (3).

The use of these poems as historical evidence is tricky business, as W. duly notes, and the first chapter (“Eschatological Themes in Epigrams”) deals with the broad theoretical question of the extent to which, and under what circumstances, funerary poetry can be viewed as a reflection of actual belief. Most critics now believe that the presence of common themes and language in epitaphs produced at different times and in different places probably reflect the existence of books of exemplars from which epigrammatists could draw. In addition, many epigrams looked to, whether directly or indirectly, a wide range of antecedent texts (in this regard, however, the claims made on p.12 do not draw an adequate distinction between epigrams intended as literary exercises and those intended for inscription; the concept of *imitatio cum variatione* applies very tenuously to the latter, and, at any rate, in a different way). Thus not every statement inscribed in an epitaph necessarily reflects the actual belief of its honorand. On this central question, W. refines the view of Chaniotis that assertions about a happy posthumous existence may be taken seriously as direct evidence of the views of the deceased or his family when coupled with other information about specific beliefs, practices, or virtues. Whereas Chaniotis restricted his corpus of meaningful statements on the afterlife to a small group of highly individualized epigrams, for W., the very selection of topoi (however banal themselves) for inclusion in an epitaph is itself potentially valuable evidence.

The balance of the book considers a range of different ways in which posthumous existence can be represented in epitaphs. Chapter 2 (“The Dead as Gods”) treats epigrams in which the deceased is said to undergo some form of apotheosis, whether in the form of a specific god, or, far more often, by being transported into the ether.

Chapter 3 (“The Dead as Heroes”) explores cases in which the deceased is represented as a hero, a practice that came to be common in inscriptions from the Hellenistic period on. Here, W. addresses the extent to which such claims may be understood either as symbolic and conventional markers of prestige, without specific religious significance, or as a reflection of meaningful cult practice and belief; in the process, the chapter explores the question of what the description of a dead person as a ἥρως might imply about the beliefs of those who erected the monument. On this score, W. offers a broad and sensitive account of how, in the tradition of funerary poetry and of consolation, the private appreciation of relatives and the civic admiration for those who had done public good, might lead to their being treated as heroes and thus protecting spirits. Chapter 4 (“Marriages with Gods”) examines the commonplace representation of premature death as a marriage to the gods of the Underworld, a tradition tracing back at least to the famous 6th-century epitaph for Phrasicleia (*CEG* 24). Chapter 5 (“The Deceased as the Chosen Ones”) raises to a greater extent the idea that the alleged beauty of the deceased made him or her the object of divine attention, even attraction. In particular, W. considers the deployment of the story of the abduction of Ganymede, probing the extent to which the myth served as a metaphor for the ascension of the soul into the heavens and thus for life after death, and cautiously engaging with the idea that epigrams in which the deceased is said to be abducted by a deity represented a serious expression of hope for the afterlife as a result of the god’s attraction to the beauty of dead person. Chapter 6 (“The Deceased as the Charges of the Deities”), on the other hand, focuses on the theme of the abduction of the deceased by nymphs. W. discusses the scholarly debate about the significance of the theme, concluding that there is no evidence for any explicit connection between the motif and a particular set of religious beliefs about the afterlife. The final chapter offers a conclusion in which W. seeks a middle ground between romantic and positivist approaches to funerary imagery. Here the concept of “beauty” comes directly to the fore: for W., the theme of the abduction by a divinity serves to underscore the dead person’s beauty, an implication that could serve as a form of consolation for his or her family, especially in the case of those who perished young and thus could not achieve recognition through their accomplishments or offspring.

Given W.’s strength in engaging with others’ arguments, the book can serve as a useful starting place for those looking to survey the state of the question. Moreover, the book contains many interesting and persuasive discussions of the issues involved in individual epigrams. There is, however, sometimes room to wish that W. had discussed the poems he adduces in much greater detail; though, for instance, W. regularly acknowledges some of the literary background to individual motifs, greater attention to the way that individual examples are located within the broader tradition would have been helpful as a control. Ultimately, the issues discussed in the book are too tricky—and the evidence too slippery and diffuse both in terms of chronology and geography—to allow for much confidence about what any particular image or set of images means in a given poem, and general statements about their significance, however judiciously framed, can sometimes seem reductive.

The book is designed to be accessible to a general audience, and all block quotations of Greek texts are preceded by translations. Given that many readers will likely come to the book without perfect Greek, it is unfortunate that they have not been better served by the translations, which are sometimes either misleading or inaccurate, though not necessarily in ways that significantly affect the broader interpretation. On p. 100, for instance, the translation of 67.1–2 Bernand misrepresents the opposition set up in the opening verses, where οὐχὶ κρόκῳ παστός σε διάβροχος, οὐδὲ (sic: read οὐδέ) νυπεῦκα[ι] / ἄγαγον ἐς νύμφας ἡμερόπνου θάλαμον is wrongly translated (“[You did not cross] the saffron veil, nor did torches lead you to the wedding chamber, where desire breathes”): παστός (whatever its precise sense here) and πεῦκαι must be syntactically parallel (cf. Bernand ad loc.), and the phrase means “Neither the παστός (“bridal curtain”; but cf. Antipat. Sid. *AP* 7.711.1–2 = *HE* 548–9 with Gow–Page ad loc.) wet with saffron nor torches led you to the wedding chamber redolent of desire” (for πνέω and cognates of smells, cf. *AP* 13.29.3). Similarly, in the translation of Peek 961.2 (ἄρ<τ>ι κλυτῶν Παφίης ἀψάμενον θαλάμων) on p. 129, the aorist participle ἀψάμενον is treated without comment as if it were future ἀψόμενον (“when I was about to reach Paphia’s famous chambers”; better, “having only just recently reached Paphia’s chambers”). Small typographical errors in Greek, most trivial (e.g. p. 58 Ἀδίης, p. 127 ἀγαθοί), are common; the practice of persistently marking certain short vowels in non-metrical contexts (e.g. p. 157 μᾶνία, p. 193 ἀρτιφῦής) where the quantity is irrelevant is puzzling.

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