



[Author] CEG 482 (unknown author)

[Place of discovery] Athens

[Source] marble stele with knight and standing figure in relief

[Typology] Elegy (epitaph)

[Period] 400–350 BC

[Text]

πολλὰ μεθ' ἡλικίας ὁμοήλικος ἡδέα παίσας
ἐκ γαίας βλαστών γαῖα πάλιν γέγονα·
εἰμὶ δὲ Ἀριστοκλῆς Πειραιεύς, παῖς δὲ Μένωνος

[Metrics]

Elegy couplet followed by hexameter

[Critical apparatus]

Ionic Milesian alphabet with notation of long vowels; *scriptio plena* in v. 3 in δὲ Ἀριστοκλῆς, but elided form in v. 1 in μεθ' ἡλικίας (note the aspirated consonant).

[Translation]

After many pleasant moments spent with young people of my own age,
I, who sprouted from the earth, have become earth once more;
I am Aristocles of Piraeus, son of Menon.

[Comment]

This is one of many examples of epigraphic epigrams from the 4th century that reveal significant similarities with classical elegies and their innovations, namely the alteration of the normal hexameter-pentameter stanzaic sequence, the adoption of metaphorical and allusive language, and greater formal refinement, thanks to the number and variety of rhetorical devices, with a particular preference for figures of sound. It is a conception of poetic creation as a game and virtuosity in the use of words: literary examples of this new way of composing elegies are frs 1 and 5 W. by Dionysius Calco or fr. 4 W. by Critias. In the case of CEG 482, the traditional sequence of the elegiac couplet was not adopted and, in terms of content, the image of becoming earth, which is traditional in itself (see *Il.* 7.99 ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς μὲν πάντες ὕδωρ καὶ γαῖα γένοισθε, as well as *Theogn.* 878 ἐγὼ δὲ θανῶν γαῖα μέλαν' ἔσομαι), is presented in parallel with that of being born from the earth thanks to the effective polytotum of the pentameter (*γαίας* / *γαῖα*) and further alluded to by the metaphorical value of βλαστάνω, perfectly calibrated to the image of sprouting that makes man a flower, without considering the more strictly philosophical aspect of the expression “to be born from the earth and become earth” (e.g. in Xenophanes, in fr. 27 D.-K. ἐκ γαίης γὰρ πάντα καὶ εἰς γῆν πάντα τελευτᾶ). A sophisticated rhetorical effect is also evident in line 1, in the sequence μεθ' ἡλικίας ὁμοήλικος, which emphasises, in the etymological figure and figurative use of ἡλικία, the youthful sharing of happy moments clearly indicated by ἡδέα παίσας, an explicit reference that is recalled with strong alliteration by the opening word *γαίας* of the following verse, thus denoting the syntactic and semantic unity of the initial couplet. The last verse stands alone, entirely occupied by the usual indication of the name, birthplace and origin of the deceased. It is therefore clear that the unusual metrical structure

is justified by the semantic bipartition of the text.

[Reference edition]

P.A. HANSEN, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca saeculi IV a. Chr. n.* (CEG II), Berolini et Novi Eboraci 1989.

[Essential bibliography]

K. FLOWER SMITH, ‘Some Irregular Forms of the Elegiac Distich’, *AJPh* 22.2, 1901, 165-194; M.M. SASSI, ‘Riflessione filosofica e ideologia funeraria: la stele di Aristocle’, *DArch.* 1, 1981, 33-40; SEG 33, 215.

[Keywords]

Epitaph in couplets, classical elegy, irregular metrical structure, formal elaboration

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