

CHRISTOS TSAGALIS, *Inscribing Sorrow: Fourth-Century Attic Funerary Epitaphs*, Berlin - New York: De Gruyter, 2008, pp. xiv + 368, ISBN 9783110201321.

In the past several years, the burgeoning of scholarly interest in the highly literary epigrams of the Hellenistic period has encouraged renewed attention to the genre's inscribed ancestors, and scholars like Bing, Bruss, Tueller, Petrovic, and Meyer (to name only a few recent contributors to the discussion) have focused on ways in the compositions of third-century epigrammatists engage with the conventions of poems originally composed for stone. Christos Tsagalis' monograph comes as a welcome addition to the literature on epigram. In it, he undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the corpus of fourth-century epitaphs from Attica as collected by Hansen (*CEG* 466–626), taking seriously the poems as compositions, and examining ways that they reflect and engage with broader changes in Athenian society in the fourth century. Tsagalis' interpretations of individual poems are always clever and interesting, even on those occasions that his effort to extract as much meaning as possible from the epigrams leads him to push past the boundaries of plausibility. There are, indeed, a number of places where Tsagalis' philological and interpretive claims go too far, or seem to require greater rigor. This is unfortunate, because *Inscribing Sorrow* is both learned and accessible, and has much to recommend it both as a study of fourth-century epigram in general and for its readings of individual epigrams.

After an introduction laying out the intellectual and doxographic landscape, Tsagalis' first chapter offers an interesting discussion of the surprisingly frequent use of maxims, γνῶμαι, in fourth-century Attic epitaphs. He argues that sententious statements about the nature of human life and death function in these poems as a means to link the passing of the individual commemorated in the epitaph to the universal human experience and thus lends a private death broad, timeless significance. Tsagalis argues for seeing maxims, a form rooted in wisdom-literature, as a mark of the fundamentally oral, performative aspect of epitaphs, which would be recited aloud by each passerby many generations into the future: “[b]y having an oral wisdom-speech sub-genre such as the γνώμη carry over to the genre of epigram its oral tone, it would be possible for the latter to ‘speak’ and represent every member of the community through the *staging* of a familiar and approved concept linked to a particular commemoration” (p. 48). The treatment of the use of maxims is interesting, and it is thus a shame that Tsagalis' quest for markers of orality in the poems sometimes undermines the strength of his larger argument (e.g. p. 48, on the style and diction of *CEG* 600; p. 50 on alleged cases of alliteration, which are treated as “mnemonic devices”).

In the Chapter 2, “Poetic Imagery,” Tsagalis explores the development and deployment in fourth-century epitaphs of two poetic images, the metaphor

of the “light of life” and the treatment of the Underworld as the “chamber of Persephone.” Tsagalis plausibly accepts the view that the recurrence of similar phraseology in multiple epigrams is due to the use of written books of epigrams from which individual poets could draw. That assumption raises a thorny problem that implicitly underlies his discussion the epigrams in which variations of these images occur: to what extent is an individual poet making use of a conventional image in a meaningful way rather than merely drawing on convenient phraseology? Tsagalis’ interpretations are often acute, but I sometimes found myself wishing for greater rigor in his evaluation of the extent to which the use of a given phrase in an epitaph can be read as marked. Thus, for example, on *CEG* 510, Tsagalis suggests that the choice of the phrase *κατέχει Φερσεφώνηςθάλαμος* is partially conditioned by the name of the deceased, Phanagora (which he derives from *φάος* + *ἀγείρω*), and thus part of a larger play on light and dark (p. 93). Several pages later, however, we find the identical phrase in the final pentameter of *CEG* 513, in which the name of the deceased carries no such connotation (*Μνησαρέτην κατέχει Φερσεφώνης θάλαμος*). That the latter passage might call into question an interpretation that places particular emphasis on the connotation of the proper name in 510 would have been better raised and addressed more directly.

Indeed, Tsagalis’ recurrent interest in identifying ways that the epigrams play on the name of the deceased yields mixed results. The discussion of *CEG* 513 (pp. 98–100) offers a valuable reading of the way in which the *arete* that is “innate” in the name of the deceased, Mnesarete, becomes the unifying force of the poem. On the other hand, in the discussion of *CEG* 489, the name Glauciades is claimed, via an implausible and circuitous argument, to evoke a quality of the god Ares, who is mentioned in the gnome with which the poem opens and who is described in another unrelated epitaph as having flashing eyes; the interpretive burden placed on the name, which after all was borne by a real person, is more than it can reasonably bear. The discussion of *CEG* 592 is equally frustrating. Tsagalis suggests that there is a thematic connection between the nickname of the dead woman, Cercope (“Cicada”), prominently mentioned at the opening of the epigram, and her death at an old age, since cicadas were thought to live a long life and not to suffer from the ravages of old age. That connection, in his view, helps explain why the claim that she traveled to the “chamber of Persephone” comes in the middle rather than, as in other examples, at the end of the epigram: “By placing this eschatological formula at the middle of the grave epigram instead of its very end, the author of the inscription is able to diminish its force and subdue it to the main thematic thread the epitaph unravels, i.e. the cicada-like life and death of Hedytion, whose nickname was ‘the tiny cicada’” (pp. 120–1). Tsagalis may well be right that the poem’s foregrounding of the nickname of the dead woman is thematically relevant to the fact that she lived a long life; this in itself is an important insight. But to what extent does the poem actually make the connection? In Tsagalis’ view, the phrase *ὥσπερ με προσήκει* “blurs the boundaries between the literal and the figurative, since it may well be referring to the cicada/deceased, and so ‘befitting’ may imply what is appropriate for a

cicada,” but this view distorts the actual argument of the final line, which is that it was right for the woman to have been buried through the piety of her daughter: *προσήκει* clearly refers to the daughter’s *εὐσεβία*, not the age at which Cercopoe died, and, even if some readers will have connected the deceased nickname with her long life, the grounds for taking the phrase “chamber of Persephone” or its position in the poem as particularly marked are extremely thin.

The third chapter treats the way in which the epitaphs, which by their very nature commemorate a private, personal loss, are situated in the broader Athenian social context. Tsagalis begins by exploring the deployment of the concepts of *arete* and *sophrosyne*, which in the fourth century lose their aristocratic dimension and denote private qualities that come to represent the socially determined measure of public praise. Of particular value in this section is the discussion of the way the new prominence of the word *μνημεῖον* rather than *μνήμα* reflects broader social changes: the monument is no longer just a memorial of the deceased, but a record of his or her virtues. Drawing on the concept of the “thick and thin” level of social activity at the intersection of private and civic realms, Tsagalis explores how fourth-century epitaphs focus their praise on social aspects of the dead person’s life, considering the ways in which family, age, and profession are treated (differently) in epitaphs for men and for women.

The long final chapter, “Narrative Development and Poetic Technique,” is in many ways the most important in the book, and will be useful to anyone interested in inscribed and literary epigram. In it, Tsagalis deals in a broader sense with the developing “subliterary” quality of fourth-century epitaphs, a phenomenon that he connects to increasing personal focus of these poems. Tsagalis surveys the corpus from a range of perspectives, including narrative development, voice, diction, dialect, and meter. The discussion demonstrates nicely the increasing sophistication of epitaphs composed in the late Classical period, not only at the level of word choice (more tragic vocabulary, high-style compound epithets; less reliance on the language of epic) but also in narrative and grammatical structure. As elsewhere, the treatment of individual epigrams and of broader phenomena has much to offer, but is not always convincing. I found, for instance, the discussion of the use of proper names in the metrical and non-metrical parts of inscriptions to be particularly valuable, but was little persuaded by the section on word play: the claim, for instance, that in *CEG* 545, an epitaph for the Theban Theitogeiton, son of Thymouchus, the composer “has embedded the dead man’s name and patronymic as well as his place of origin within the metrical part of the inscription, in order to create an aural association enhanced by the alliteration of the sound *th*,” raises unexplored questions about the extent to which the alliteration in this case would have been considered marked (especially given that it is not unusual for epitaphs to include the name of the deceased, that of his father, or his homeland) and about the extent to which this can be seen as part of the broader project of the epigrammatist; something similar may be said about the interpretive burden placed on the alleged sigmatism of *CEG* 551.

Despite my reservations about some of the specific arguments advanced in it, *Inscribing Sorrow* remains an important contribution to the study of epigram. Tsagalis is to be congratulated for producing a comprehensive monograph that takes the epitaphs from fourth-century Attica seriously both as social documents and as works of literature in their own right. Though there is sometimes room to disagree with his interpretation of individual epitaphs, the book as a whole paints a valuable picture of the poetry that served as the basis for the flourishing of epigram as a literary form in subsequent generations.

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