

BELLARIA LXVIII



Sappho and Alcaeus (Lawrence Alma-Tadema: 1881)

THE GREEK (PALATINE) ANTHOLOGY I

Introduction

This anthology of 3,765 poems in Greek was drawn from a compilation made c. AD 900 by the Byzantine schoolmaster Constantine Cephalas, to which later additions were made (e.g. Christian and descriptive epigrams) and subtractions, not to mention editions, one by Planudes in 1301 (now misleadingly associated with Book 16). The full form in which we now have it was not officially published until 1803 (revised 1817). Doubtless Strato's homoerotic poetry (Book 12) had something to do with it.

In this introduction we will sample one epigram from each of the sixteen volumes.

Book 1: Christian Epigrams

Most of these inscriptions are found in Byzantine churches pre-AD 1000. They are a later addition to the original anthology. Note in this epigram the point about the effect of colour.

Prints of Angels



The image of the invisible Prince of the Angels incorporeal in form –
greatly daring was the wax that formed it!

But yet it is not without grace; for a man looking at the image
directs his mind to a higher contemplation.

5 No longer has he a confused veneration, but in himself
imprinting the image, he trembles before him, as if he were present.

The eyes stir up the depths of the spirit, and art knows how to
Convey by colours the prayers of the soul.

ἄσκοπον ἀγγελίαρχον, ἀσώματον εἶδεῖ μορφῆς,

ἃ μέγα τολμήεις κηρὸς ἀπεπλάσατο·

ἔμπης οὐκ ἀχάριστον, ἐπεὶ βροτὸς εἰκόνα λεύσσω

θυμὸν ἀπιθύνει κρέσسونι φαντασίῃ·

5 οὐκέτι δ' ἄλλοπρόσαλλον ἔχει σέβας, ἀλλ' ἐν ἑαυτῷ

τὸν τύπον ἐγγράψας ὡς παρεόντα τρέμει·

ὄμματα δ' ὀτρύνουσι βαθὺν νόον, οἶδε δὲ τέχνη

χρώμασι πορθμεῦσαι τὴν φρενὸς ἰκεσίην.

Agathias Scholasticus 1.34

Book 2: Christodorus' description of the bronze statues in the famous gymnasium of Zeuxippus in Egypt

Anybody in ancient myth or history who was anyone features in these epigrams.

Here is Aeneas' wife Creusa:

Creusa



And I wondered looking on Creusa by mourning raiment—
wife of Aeneas—shadowed over. Around

150 both her cheeks drawing her veil,
she wrapped her whole body around in a long gown,
as one lamenting; her bronze tears
signified that her nurse Troy had been captured by Ares,
having been besieged by the Greek warriors.

Ἦγασάμην δὲ Κρέουσαν ἰδὼν πενθήμονι κόσμῳ,
σύγγαμον Αἰνείαιο κατάσκιον· ἀμφὶ γὰρ αὐταῖς
150 ἀμφοτέραις κρήδεμνον ἐφελκύσασα παρειαῖς,
πάντα πέριξ ἐκάλυψε ποδηνεκεί χροά πέπλω,
οἷά τε μυρομένη· τὰ δὲ χάλκεα δάκρυα νύμφης
Ἄρει δουρίκτητον ἔμαντεύοντο τιθήνην,
Ἴλιον Ἀργείοισιν ἐελμένον ἀσπιδιώταις.

2.148-54

Book 3: The Cyclic epigrams

These were inscribed by Attalus and Eumenes on a monument in Cyzicus dedicated to their beloved mother Apollonis. They represent filial devotion.

Anticleia



Anticleia, mother of wise Odysseus,
you did not live to receive your son in Ithaca;
but at you on the shore of Acheron
he marvels, seeing his sweet mother.

μᾶτερ' Ὀδυσσῆος πινυτόφρονος Ἀντίκλεια,
ζῶσα μὲν εἰς Ἴθάκην οὐχ ὑπέδεξο πᾶιν·
ἀλλὰ σε νῦν Ἀχέροντος ἐπὶ ῥηγμῖσι γεγῶσαν
θαμβεῖ, ἀνὰ γλυκερὰν ματέρα δερκόμενος.

3.8

Book 4: The proems of some anthologies



These contain the proems to three collections of poetry. They end with a poem about the value of such anthologies:

Columns and pictures and inscribed tablets are a source
of great delight to those who possess them,
but only during their life; for the empty glory of man
does not much benefit the spirits of the dead.

5 But virtue and the grace of wisdom both accompany us there
and survive here attracting memory. So neither Plato nor Homer
takes pride in pictures or monuments, but in wisdom alone.

Blessed are they whose memory is enshrined in wise volumes
10 and not in empty images.

στήλαι καὶ γραφίδες καὶ κύρβιες, εὐφροσύνης μὲν
αἷτια τοῖς ταῦτα κτησαμένοις μεγάλης,
ἀλλ' ἐς ὅσον ζώουσι. τὰ γὰρ κενὰ κύδεα φωτῶν
ψυχαῖς οἰχομένων οὐ μάλα συμφέρεται.

5 ἢ δ' ἀρετὴ σοφίης τε χάρις καὶ κεῖθι συνέρπει,
κάνθάδε μιμνάζει μνηστὶν ἐφελκομένη.
οὕτως οὔτε Πλάτων βρενθύεται οὔτ' ἄρ' Ὅμηρος
χρώμασιν ἢ στήλαις, ἀλλὰ μόνη σοφίη.

ὄλβιοι ὧν μνήμη πινυτῶν ἐνὶ τεύχεσι βίβλων,
10 ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐς κενεὰς εἰκόνας ἐνδιάει.

Agathias Scholasticus 4.4

Book 5: Love poems

Love's torment



I fell in love, kissed, got lucky, scored, am loved.
But who I am, and whose, and how – god only knows.

Ἡράσθην, ἐφίλουν, ἔτυχον, κατέπραξ', ἀγαπῶμαι·
τίς δέ, καὶ ἦς, καὶ πῶς, ἢ θεὸς οἶδε μόνη.

Anonymous 5.51

Book 6: Dedicatory epigrams

These cover a huge range: public, historical, male (large number of occupations)
and female.

A mousy anti-dedication



Out of my hut, you mice that love the dark! Leonidas'
poor meal-tub does not know how to feed mice.
The old man is contented if he has salt and two barley-cakes.
This is the life we accepted from my fathers.
5 So why do you dig for treasure in that corner, you glutton,
where you won't even taste leftovers from dinner?
Hurry and be off to other houses (mine are thin pickings)
where you'll carry off much more fare.

Φεύγεθ' ὑπέκ καλύβης, σκότιοι μύες· οὔτι πενιχρὴ
μῦς σιπύη βόσκειν οἶδε Λεωνίδεω.
αὐτάρκης ὁ πρέσβυς ἔχων ἄλα καὶ δύο κρῖμνα·
ἐκ πατέρων ταύτην ἠνέσαμεν βιοτήν.
5 τῶ τί μεταλλεύεις τοῦτον μυχόν, ὦ φιλόλιχνε,
οὐδ' ἀποδειπνιδίου γεύομενος σκυβάλου;
σπεύδων εἰς ἄλλους οἴκους ἴθι—τάμὰ δὲ λιτά—
ὦν ἄπο πλειοτέρην οἴσεται ἀρμαλιήν.

Leonidas 6.302

Book 7: Sepulchral epigrams

Burning your boat



Mygdon, the span of his life finished, went in his own boat
to Hades, not requiring the ferry-boat of the dead.
For she who was in life his support and the witness of his toil,
often loaded with his prey from the sea,
5 was his fellow-traveller in death too, when to his end
he came in company with the burning boat;

so faithful to her master was she, increasing his substance
and travelling with him to life and to death.

Μύγδων τέρμα βίοιο λαχών, αὐτόστολος ἦλθεν
εἰς αἶδην, νεκύων πορθμίδος οὐ χατέων.
ἦν γὰρ ἔχε ζῶων βιοδώτορα, μάρτυρα μόχθων,
ἄγραις εἰναλίαις πολλάκι βριθομένην,
5 τήνδε καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ λάχε σύνδρομον, εὔτε τελευτὴν
εὔρετο συλλήξας ὀλκάδι καιομένη.
οὔτω πιστὸν ἄνακτι πέλεν σκάφος, οἶκον ἀέξον
Μύγδονι, καὶ σύμπλουν ἐς βίον, ἐς θάνατον.

Julianus 7.585

Book 8: Epigrams of St Gregory of Nazianus

St Gregory (AD 329-390) was a close friend of Sts Basil and Chrysostom.

Epitaph for Martinianus



If there be any Tantalus dry-throated in the deceitful waters,
if any rock above his head ever frightening him,
if any imperishable liver of a sinner that is a feast to the birds,
if there be a fiery river and eternal darkness
5 and depths of Tartarus and savage demons,
and other punishments of the dead In Hades,
may whoever injures renowned Martinianus
by disturbing his tomb, suffer every terror.

εἴ τις Τάνταλός ἐστιν ἐν ὕδασι αὔρος ἀπίστοις,
εἴ τις ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς πέτρος αἰεὶ φοβέων,
δαπτόμενόν τ' ὄρνισιν ἀγήραον ἦπαρ ἀλιτροῦ,
καὶ πυρῶεις ποταμὸς, καὶ ζόφος ἀθάνατος,
5 ταρτάρεοί τε μυχοὶ καὶ δαίμονες ἀγριόθυμοι,
ἄλλαι τε φθιμένων τίσιες εἰν αἶδι·
ὅστις Μαρτινιανὸν ἀγακλέα δηλήσαιτο
τύμβον ἀνοχλίζων, δείματα πάντα φέροι.

Gregory Nazianus 8.104

Book 9: Declamatory epigrams

On the lavatories in a suburb of Smyrna



Blest are you, long-suffering labourer! Life for you is ever
to put up with with the pains of hoeing and poverty.
Simple are your meals, and you sleep in the woods,
after satisfying your throat's vast thirst for water.
5 Yet you are perfectly healthy, and sitting here for a few moments
At once lighten your belly.
You don't rub down the lower part of your spine,
or beat your thighs, but you get rid of the burden naturally.
They are in evil case, the rich and those who associate with them,
10 whom feasting pleases more than sound health.

εὖγε μάκαρ τλήθυμε γεωπόνε· σοὶ βίος αἰεὶ
μῖμνεν καὶ σκαπάνης ἄλγεα καὶ πενίης·
λιτὰ δέ σοι καὶ δεῖπνα, καὶ ἐν ξυλόχοισι καθεύδεις,
ὔδατος ἐμπλήσας λαιμὸν ἀμετροπότην.
5 ἔμπης ἀρτίπος ἐσσί, καὶ ἐνθάδε βαιὰ καθεσθεις
αὐτίκα γαστέρα σὴν θῆκας ἐλαφροτάτην
οὐδὲ καταψήχεις ἱερὴν ῥάχιν, οὐδέ τι μηροὺς
τύπτεις, ἀρτεμίης φόρτον ἀρωσάμενος.
τλήμονες οἱ πλουτοῦντες ἰδ' οἱ κείνοισι συνόντες
10 οἷς πλέον ἀρτεμίης εὐαδεν εἰλαπίνη.

Agathias Scholasticus 9.644

Book 10: Hortatory and admonitory epigrams

Moderation in all things

Enjoy your possessions as if about to die,
and use your goods sparingly as if about to live.
That man is wise who understands both these commandments,
and has applied a measure both to thrift and unthrift.

ὡς τεθνηξόμενος τῶν σῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπόλαυε,
ὡς δὲ βιωσόμενος φείδω σῶν κτεάνων.
ἔστι δ' ἀνὴρ σοφὸς οὗτος, ὃς ἄμφω ταῦτα νοήσας
φειδοῖ καὶ δαπάνη μέτρον ἐφηρμόσατο.

Pseudo-Lucian 10.26

A vegetarian meal



Apelles gave us a supper as if he had butchered a garden,
thinking he was feeding sheep and not friends.
There were radishes, chicory, fenugreek, lettuces, leeks, onions,
basil, mint, rue, and asparagus.

5 I was afraid that after all these things he would serve me with hay,
so when I had eaten some half-soaked lupins I went off.

ὡς κῆπον τεθικῶς, δεῖπνον παρέθηκεν Ἀπελλῆς,
οἰόμενος βόσκειν ἀντὶ φίλων πρόβατα.
ἦν ῥαφανίς, σέρις ἦν, τῆλις, θρίδακες, πράσα, βολβοί,
ῶκιμον, ἡδύοσμον, πήγανον, ἀσπάραγος·
5 δείσας δ' ἐκ τούτων μὴ καὶ χόρτον παραθῆ μοι,
δειπνήσας θέρμους ἡμιβρεχεῖς, ἔφυγον.

Ammianus 11.413

Book 12: Strato's homo-erotic epigrams (*Musa puerilis*)

A Ganymede



In summer, when I was athirst, I kissed the tender-fleshed boy
and said, when I was free of my parching thirst,
'Father Zeus, the nectareous kiss of Ganymede,
do you drink and is this the wine he tenders to your lips?'
For now that I have kissed the fairest of our youth,
Antiochus, I have drunk the sweet honey of the soul.

διψῶν ὡς ἐφίλησα θέρευσ ἀπαλόχροα παῖδα,
εἶπα τότε αὐχμηρὰν δίψαν ἀποπροφυγῶν
Ἰεῦ πάτερ, ἄρα φίλημα τὸ νεκτάρειον Γανυμήδεος
πίνεις, καὶ τότε σοι χεῖλεσιν οἴνοχοεῖ;
καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τὸν καλὸν ἐν ἠιθέοισι φιλήσας
Ἄντιοχον, ψυχῆς ἡδὺ πέπωκα μέλι.

Meleager 12.133

Book 13: Epigrams in various metres

Tetrameters

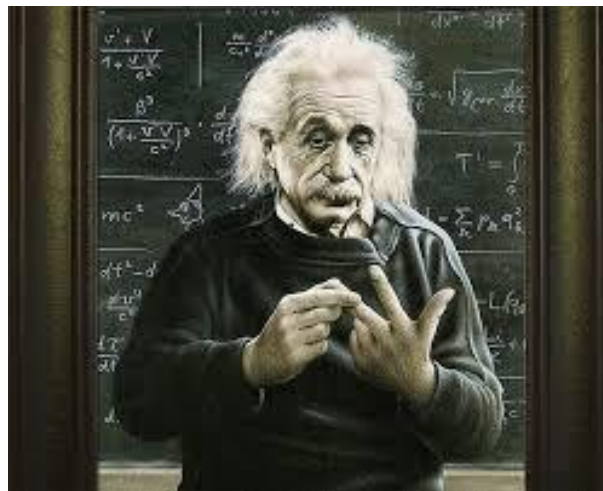
I pity you, Aristokleides, first of all among my brave friends;
You lost your young life, defending the country from enslavement.
(tum-ti-tum-tum x 4)

ἀλκίμων σ', ὦ ἄριστοκλείδη, πρῶτον οἰκτεῖρω φίλων·
ᾤλεσας δ' ἤβην, ἀμύνων πατρίδος δουληίην.

Anacreon 13.4

Book 14: Arithmetical problems, riddles, oracles

Guess the age



For the whole life he lived as a boy,
Demochares lived a quarter of it. As a young man, for a fifth part of it,
among men for a third, and when he reached grey old age
he lived thirteen years more on the threshold of old age.

παντός ὅσου βεβίωκε χρόνου παῖς μὲν τὸ τέταρτον
Δημοχάρης βεβίωκε· νεηνίσκος δὲ τὸ πέμπτον,
τὸ τρίτον εἰς ἄνδρας· πολὺν δ' ὅτ' ἀφίκετο γῆρας
ἔζησεν λοιπὰ τρισκαίδεκα γῆραος οὐδῶ.

Solution: He lived 15 years as a boy, 12 as a young man, 10 as a man, and 13 years as an old man; in a1160.

Anonymous 14.127

Homeric editor at work



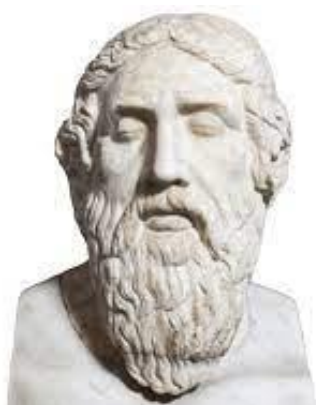
I, Cometas, finding the books of Homer
corrupt and quite unpunctuated,
punctuated them and polished them artistically,
throwing away the rubbish as being useless,
5 and with my hand I rejuvenated what was useful.
Hence writers not erroneously
now desire to learn them, but as is proper.

εὐρών Κομητᾶς τὰς Ὀμηρεῖους βίβλους
ἐφθαρμένας τε κούδαμῶς ἐστιγμένας,
στίξας διεσμίλευσα ταύτας ἐντέχνως,
τὴν σαπρίαν ρύψας μὲν ὡς ἀχρηστίαν,
5 γράψας δ' ἐκαινούργησα τὴν εὐχρηστίαν.
ἐντεῦθεν οἱ γράφοντες οὐκ ἐσφαλμένως
μαθητιῶσιν, ὡς ἔοικε μανθάνειν.

Cometas (c. AD 1000) 15.38

Book 16: Epigrams from the Anthology put together by Planudes

Nick Robinson and Homer



‘Were you a Chian?’ ‘I say “No”’. ‘What then, a Smyrnian?’ ‘I deny it.’
‘Was either Cyme or Colophon your native place, Homer?’
‘Neither.’ ‘Was Salamis your city?’ ‘No, neither from her
Do I spring.’ ‘But tell me yourself where you were born.’
5 ‘I will not.’ ‘Why?’ ‘I know for sure that, if I tell the truth,
I shall make the other cities my enemies.’

‘Χῖος ἔφυς;’ ‘οὐ φημι.’ ‘τί δαί, Σμυρναῖος;’ ‘ἀπαυδῶ.’
‘Κύμη δ’ ἢ Κολοφῶν πατρίς, Ὅμηρε, σέθεν;’
‘Οὐδετέρη.’ ‘Σαλαμῖς δὲ τεῖ πόλις;’ ‘οὐδ’ ἀπὸ ταύτης
ἔξέφυν.’ ‘ἀλλ’ αὐτὸς λέξον ὅπῃ γέγονας.’
‘οὐκ ἔρέω.’ ‘τίνος ἦρα;’ Πέπεισμ’ ὅτι τὰ τρεκὲς εἰπὼν
ἔξω τὰς ἄλλας ἄμμιν ἀπεχθομένας.’

Anonymous 16.299

Next week: ‘They told me, Heraclitus...’, and his one extant nightingale.