

ANTHOLOGIA PALATINA (EPIGRAMS FREE FROM THE HELLENIC),  
OR, WEIGHING UP EROS AND DEVOURING TIME

From Plato (C4 BCE)

I Lais who proudly laughed at swarms of youthful  
Lovers, here leave my mirror to the goddess.  
I don't want to see myself as i'm now  
I cannot see myself as i was then.

From Anyte of Tegea (poetess, Doric school, end of C4 BCE)

We died, o Miletus, beloved fatherland,  
Refusing to lie under the lawless Gauls,  
We three girls of this town, reduced  
By horrid War to equal lot.  
We did not know bestial rape nor proper  
Bridegroom, but married Hades as defender.

From Erinna, of Telos? (poetess, mid-C4 BCE)

O stelae & sirens & sad urn  
Who hold forever my few ashes  
Greet those who come to my grave & say  
That newly married i fell into the tomb,  
That i was named Baucis, my land Telos,  
& my friend Erinna wrote me this verse.

*From Aristonos (C3 BCE)*

If you've emerged looking for bread, mice,  
This is a poor cabin, wend elsewhere.  
You'll find there fat cheese, dried figs,  
A tasty dinner with abundant crumbs.  
Here, if you sink your teeth into my books,  
You'll cry for the unhappy meal you found.

*From Asclepiades (C3 BCE)*

You defend your virginity. Why? In Hades  
You won't find a single lover, girl.  
Venus's pleasures are among the living;  
On Lethe shore, o virgin, we'll be ashes & bones.

\*\*\*

I dallied one day with Hermione, love's  
Minion. On her flower girdle, o Paphian goddess,  
Golden letters spelled out: "Love me all around,  
& do not grieve if others also touch me".

\*\*\*

Sweet is in summer snow for thirst, sweet  
In winter to mariners the breath of Zephyr  
Announcing spring; but how much sweeter to lovers  
Embracing under a coverlet, celebrating Venus.

\*\*\*

I'm not twenty-two yet but i'm sick of living.  
You Amorini, why this pain, why are you burning me?  
& if i die, what will you do? Sure, i know,  
Amorini, you'll go on rolling playfully the dice.

*From Leonidas of Tarentum (C3 BCE)*

Run away from my cabin, night mouse. In Leonida's

Frugal pantry there's little fit for a mouse:  
I have a pinch of salt & two barley loaves,  
The diet of my ancestors, on which i pride myself.  
So little sweet-tooth, why are you searching this den?  
No banquet leftovers are to be found here.

\*\*\*

Huge was the time-span, o man, before you saw  
The light, & huge the span will be of Hades.  
What share do you have of life? -- a mere point,  
Or something tinier than a point, if it's to be found.  
Thus closes your little life, & it's not even joyous  
But sadder than hateful death. Restless man,  
Try to live with light thoughts, remember  
You are a reed.

\*\*\*

"As vine on a pole, i lean on my staff.  
Death calls me from Hades", said the old man.  
"Why lend a deaf ear? Why clutch at a few more years  
Under the Sun?" & he went where most have gone.

\*\*\*

Water running fresh from cleft rock,  
Greetings, & you rustic statuettes of nymphs,  
& you, scooped out sources. & greetings too  
To your water-sprinkled little images, o girls!  
I Aristocles the wayfarer offer you this horn  
Which i dipped in here to still my thirst.

*From Callimakhos of Cyrene (C3 BCE)*

You got the payment, O god of medicine, promised  
By Akheso for Demódike, his wife,  
So quit the debt. Should you forget & ask anew,  
This votive table says it will testify.

\*\*\*

He who dedicates me, Enetos, affirms (but of this i know  
Nothing) it's for a victory of his, as a token,  
That i, a brass cock, was given to Castor & Pollux.  
I believe the son of Phedrus, grandson of Philos.

\*\*\*

I heard you died, Kritos, & i cried, remembering

How often, conversing, we saw the sun go down.

Friend of my youth, now you're dust, but your nightingale verse

Lives on, Hades the pitiless can't plunder that.

From Nossis of Locris (poetess, C3 BCE)

O stranger, if the sails take you to Lesbos

Of the beautiful choirs, where Sappho's

Flower of graces flamed, say I was dear

To the Muses, I was born in Locris,

& that my name was Nossis --

Then sail on!

From Antipatros of Sidon (Rome, C2 BCE)

Brief & not too many are Erinna's poems

But the Muse was touched in her short scope.

Remembrance keeps her present, nor shall she pale

Beneath the black night's ashen wing.

While we myriads of numberless new poets

Rot all on a heap, hugely forgotten.

*From Meleagros of Gadara* (C1 BCE)

You blessed night, & you nightlight, before you  
As witnesses we swore: he to love me always,  
& i never to leave him. Now he says such vows are  
On water writ. & you see him in other arms.

\*\*\*

My soul tells me to flee Heliadora,  
& shows me all her tears & jealousies.  
It warns me, & i've no force to flee; but then  
It turns shameless, shamelessly it loves her.

\*\*\*

Come pour & again repeat, again, again, "Heliadora"  
Repeat & mix limpid wine with her sweet name.  
& crown me with yesterday's wreath, still redolent  
Of perfumes that remember her. Look,  
The rose who is a friend of lovers weeps  
When she doesn't see Heliadora held to my breast.

\*\*\*

A sweet song, by Pan of Arcadia, you modulate  
On your harp, Zenophila, sweetly you sing.  
Where shall i flee you? From all directions i'm surrounded,  
Amorini give me no moment of respite. Do i  
Desire you for your beauty, or for your grace, or...?  
What am i saying? Fires all around, i burn.

\*\*\*

Fly please, o mosquito, quick messenger, touch  
Zenophila's ear & murmur  
These words: "He awaits you sleepless. & you,  
All memory gone, you sleep!"

\*\*\*

Asclepias, lover of Eros, with her shining eyes  
Of tranquil waters,  
Takes us all for a bout of rowing  
In the sea of Eros.

\*\*\*

Eros must have sharpened Heliadora's nails.  
Their wounds scratch deep into the heart.

\*\*\*

One thing only i ask of you, ancestress of gods,  
Friendly night, i beg you, companion of pleasures:  
Should another lie under Heliodora's coverlet  
& warm himself on her sleep-stopping skin,  
Let the light wink out & he remain clod-like,  
Impotent like Endymion.

\*\*\*

O night, o sleep-devouring desire for Heliodora,  
O tearful torments of perfidious mornings,  
Has any trace remained of me? Has she tears  
For bedfellows, does she kiss & hold to my image  
In her dream, thus fooling her heart? Or a new  
& different love? Don't shine on that, o lamp!

\*\*\*

Sweet is the saucer's joy, it has touched  
Eros-loving Zenophila's puckered mouth.  
Happy thing! O if now, mouth to mouth,  
She were to drink in one gulp my soul!

\*\*\*

By Timo's lovable ringlets, by Demo's  
Fragrant skin that takes away sleep,  
By Ilia's sweet amorous games, by the watchful  
Nightlight that saw our endless frolics,  
A last breath i've still left, o Eros,  
On my lips. Say the word, i'll give it too.

\*\*\*

You cricket, soothing my pains with your stories,  
Rural Muse, swinging your sonorous wings  
With percussive feet, you sounding lyre  
Of nature, sing to me joyous lays,  
Belay this anxiety keeping sleep  
Away, o cricket, give forth a song  
That liberates from love: i'll offer you an onion  
& drops of dew that make you drunk.

\*\*\*

Earth, great ancestress, greetings! Little weight  
Trode with Erigenes on you, now cover him weightless.

\*\*\*

Tears i offer you even into the earth, Heliadora,

Relics of love into Hades,

Bitter tears onto a bewept tomb,

Memories of my desire, memories

Of loving friendship. Alas alack, your Meleager

Weeps for you, beloved, even when you're

Among the dead, in vain offering to Acheron.

Where is my beloved bud now?

I'm bereft, Hades bereft me of it. & dust

Lies on the living flower.

All-nourishing Earth, tender take to your breast

Her whom everybody weeps after!

\*\*\*

O winter wind! The sweetly weeping Eros

Takes me away from banquets, takes me to you.

Violent, tempestuous is the blast of Desire:

Harbour me, mariner in Venerean seas!

*From Antifilos of Byzantium (C1 BCE)*

Beauteous the bees'-formed river in the air,

Their narrow cells not made by human  
Hands, spontaneous offering for our lives.  
They need no spade, nor ox, nor curving sickle,  
Only a small enclosure into which the bee may pour  
The sweet brook distilled from its small body.  
Greetings, winged workers of airy nectar,  
& descend on the flowers' corollae, pure ones!

*From Diodoros Zona (C1 BCE)*

You in Hades, who guide the boat of the dead  
Thru the reedy swamp, pity my sorrow,  
Lend a hand to Kinyra's son when he descends  
From the plank, black Charon, help him!  
For the little boy stumbles over his sandals  
& fears to tread on river sand with naked feet.

*From Krinagoras of Lesbos (C1 BCE)*

How long will you, unhappy thots, fly  
With vain hopes up to the

Cold clouds, & dream of wealth?

Nothing comes by itself, without

Pain. Keep to the gifts of the Muses, let the senseless

Pursue idols of the mind.

*From Philodemos of Gadara* (C1 BCE) [friend of Virgil & Horace]

I loved: who did not? Deliriously i fucked:

Did a daimon command me?

& see now! White hairs advance

Over the black, messengers of a time

For wisdom. In playing time i played,

Now too i follow the time.

\*\*\*

In the middle of the night, secretly i left

My bedfellow, i came thru the squalls

Of rain. Was it for nothing, only for words,

& not to be bedded, as a lover?

\*\*\*

White-skinned Xantho of perfumed body

With a Muse's face, beautiful picture  
Of winged Desire, play to me again sweetly,  
With odorous hands, the ditty "In a narrow  
Stony bed, rockbound, I have to sleep  
Forever". Sing for me, little Xantho, yes,  
Yes, this sweet melody. Do you hear it, usurer?  
You'll sleep alone, in a stony bed, miserable forever.

\*\*\*

No more crowns of violets, no Khian wine,  
No more songs, nor cythars, nor Syrian  
Myrrh, orgies nor avid courtezans.  
Enough, now I hate such lunacies.  
Crown me instead with daffodils, let me listen  
To the transverse flute, pour  
Wine from Mytilene, & give me a girl  
Fresh from the forests.

*From Bianoros of Bithynia (C1 CE)*

I wept for the fate of my Teonoe,  
& more for the son hoped from her.  
O Persephone, hear a father's prayer:

Put the son into the dead mother's arms.

*From Rufinos* (ca. C2-6 CE)

Didn't i tell you, Prodiqe, "We're aging"? Didn't i predict

"Love's destroyers will soon arrive"?

Here are the lines, here the white hair, your body

Ruined, & a mouth without its former grace!

Does anyone now stop you, beg, cajole?

We pass rather by you as by a wayside tomb.

\*\*\*

You have Hera's eyes, o Melite, hands

Like Athena's, Aphrodite's breasts,

Ankles as by Thetis. Happy is who sees you,

Thrice blessed he who hears, a demigod

Who steals you a kiss, immortal he

Who may possess you.

*From Pallada* (C5 CE)

Unending pain is it to await death.

He who dies avoids at least this.

Do not weep then when one leaves life:

In death there is no further pain.

\*\*\*

Life is but playacting. Leave then wisdom

& learn the play. Or bear the pain.

\*\*\*

At the end of each night we're born, day

After day, having no part of past life,

Alien to the existence of what was,

Beginning today the rest of our life.

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I was born in tears, & now i teary die,

In between life gave me only tears.

O generation of humans, weak, unhappy,

You appear on earth & quickly disappear.

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Grown & nourished for death, we seem

Herds of swine, to be slaughtered for no reason.

*From Macedonios of Thessalonikki* (C 6 CE)

Deeply i desired you, against hope you came.

The wonder of your image upsets

My mind wholly, & i quake, my heart beats

A tattoo & runs amok, my soul

Is drowning in the seas of Cypria: in your port

Save shipwrecked me!

*From Paolos Silentiarios* (C6 CE)

Better hide the kisses, Rhodope, the dear

Danger-filled delights of Venus. What joy

Not to be seen by the all-seeing wardens!

Secret beds hide more honey than known ones.

\*\*\*

I was going to say "goodbye", when i throttled my voice

& here i am, still with you. I fear

Your bitter distance as Death's odious night.

How consubstantial is your light to day!

& day is mute, but sweeter than the Sirens

Your speech, binding my soul's hopes.

\*\*\*

Lais's smile is sweet, friends, & sweet

The tears that flow from her slow-blinking lashes.

Yesterday she cried long, head on my shoulder.

She was crying, i was kissing her, like dew-drops

Her tears fell on our glued lips. "Why cry?"

"I always fear you'll leave me. You're all untrue".

\*\*\*

I love more your wrinkles, Philinna, than youth's

Sheen. I'd rather feel in my hand

Your breast, with its point turned heavily down

Than a girl's erect breast.

Your Fall is better than her Spring, your

Winter than her Summer.

\*\*\*

I caress her breast, our mouths furiously crush,

I bite her snow-white neck, but still  
She won't give herself wholly. I run after  
A virgin who denies me her bed.  
Half of her is Venus's, half Minerva's  
Between the two i languish.

\*\*\*

Cleopantis is late. It's the third time  
The little lamp's wick has burned down  
To its end. O that with the lamp the burning  
Flame in my breast could also go out!

\*\*\*

On my bed Theano was bitterly crying,  
For the Evening Star foretold  
In its rise the dawn to come.  
Nothing is as we fleeting creatures  
Would want. Whosoever is a serf to Eros  
Dreams of polar long nights.

*From Anonymous*

Saviour of seafarers, Cypria dearest,

I'm wrecked on dry stones: from perdition preserve me!

\*\*\*

I send you a perfume. It's a gift to perfume,

Not to you: more perfumed you make the perfume.

\*\*\*

Straight is the road to Hades, whether

You sink from Athens or farthest cataract.

Do not grieve if you died far from your native land:

From anywhere the same wind to Hades wafts.

Envoi: Mais où sont...? (C21 CE)

Where is now Philodemos from Gadara, where

Acute Leonidas of Tarentum, where the love-drunk

Sweet Meleagros, & the proudly modest

Poetess Nossis, subjects of just as unhappy

Happy times? In their verse, you say? & how

Many of them survive, how much do their lives

Shine in the frozen records? All trampled

By the Gadarene swine of devouring time;  
As the dirtied snows of the bygone winters  
Of the whirling Earth.

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