

Some “Autobiographical” Funerary Inscriptions in the First Person

Grave of a Seven-year-old Boy from Athens (second century or later)

My dear father and mother named me Thesmophanes before I met my miserable death. For me the Fates (*moirai*) spun seven complete years with their threads and then cut them off. My renowned father graciously satisfied me with every good thing, as one does for the best children. He took care of all the drink-offerings and whatever else for the gods for the sake of my soul. The priests of Eumolpos made a sacred branch for me and (10) gave me ... great (?) ... honor. The society-members (*thiasitai*) of Dionysos wove me a crown, and I was initiated into the mysteries of torch-bearing Demeter. I won a good honor, since the saying is true that children the gods love ... die (?) ... Therefore, good father, do not distress your dear heart longer in sorrow. (*IG II² 11674*. Translation adapted from Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook in Translation* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2005], 303–304).

Grave of a Dionysiac Initiate and Performer from Amastris in Asia Minor (155 CE)

It was now my thirtieth year. My father named me Aemilianus. Geminus, a man of the nobility, brought me up. In the presence of burning incense (or: burnt offerings), I led the band of revellers mystically in the rite for the triennial god Euios (i.e. Dionysos). I was also revered in the gymnasia and experienced in wrestling, javelin-throwing, kick-boxing (pankration), discus-throwing, circular racing (or: using a hoop), jumping, and all rhythmic ball playing, each of which my foster-father taught me. I won with a (10) satyr play (or: satyr dance) at Kyzikos and Pergamon. At Kyzikos I myself won the crown, but at Pergamon cruel fate carried off the crown. Misfortune withered my body on Dorian soil, but Geminus my foster-father, carrying my bones to my homeland, placed them into a stone chest which was adorned with eternal crowns. Year 225, one before the Kalends of September (= 31 August), which is Loos 17 (*AGRW 93*; trans. Harland).

Grave of a Teenaged Initiate of Dionysos from Saittai in Asia Minor (240/241 CE)

I, who did not experience Love (Cypris; i.e. Aphrodite) and was an enemy of wickedness, was taken as a companion by Bromios (“Thunderer”) together with the Fates (*moirai*). He

(Bromios) has me as a fellow–initiate in his own dances. My name is Julianus, and I lived 17 years. My father was Julianus and my mother was Apphias. When I died, they honoured me with (10) the tomb and this inscribed monument. His paternal uncle Asklepiades, his aunt Juliane, his maternal uncle Dionysios, Ammianos, and Stratoneikos honoured him. Year 325 (of the Sullan era), 12th of the month of Peritios. (*TAM V* 477; trans. Harland)

Grave of Abercius from Hieropolis in Asia Minor (before 200 CE)

Citizen of a chosen city, I constructed this tomb while still living, in order that I might have here a splendid resting-place for my body. My name is Abercius, disciple of the holy shepherd, who pastures his flocks of sheep on the mountains and plains, (5) and whose eyes are great and all-seeing. It was he who taught me trustworthy knowledge, and it was he who sent me to Rome, to see the queen of cities, and to see a Queen with golden robes and golden shoes. And I saw there a people with a shining seal. (10) I also saw the plain of Syria and all its cities, even Nisibis, beyond the Euphrates. I found brothers everywhere, with Paul beside me on my wagon. Everywhere Faith led the way; everywhere it nourished me with the fish from the spring, great and pure, caught by a holy maiden. (15) Everywhere she gave the fish to her dear ones to eat, with good wine, handing it to us mixed with bread. I, Abercius, stood by and dictated this, having reached my seventy-second year in all truth. Let all who understand and approve these words pray for Abercius. (20) No one shall bury another in my grave; if he does, he shall pay 2000 denarii in gold to the Roman treasury and 1000 denarii in gold to my good homeland of Hierapolis. (Trans. adapted from Peter Thonemann, “Abercius of Hierapolis: Christianization and Social Memory in Late Antique Asia Minor,” in *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World*, ed. Beate Dignas and R.R.R. Smith [Oxford: CUP, 2012], 257-82, at page 258).

Grave of a Boy Who Performed the Rites of Dionysos from Rome (first or second century CE)

This was dedicated to the gods of the underworld. Not yet having tasted youth, I slipped into the realm of Hades, leaving behind tears and groans to my parents for my short time. Nor was I meant to reach the life span of mortals. I lived only seven years and two months, of which three years I accomplished and spoke the rites (*orgia*) for Dionysos. (10) My father and revered mother called me Herophilos. Oh passerby, you now know who I was. I was not even brought into being (*AGRW* 328; trans. Harland).