

4 — Timon Again | 51 G-P

Τίμων, οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἐσσί, τί τοι, σκότος ἢ φάος, ἐχθρόν;
“τὸ σκότος· ὑμέων γὰρ πλείονες εἰν Αἴδη.”

Sources: AP 7.317 [C] Καλλιμάχου [J] εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν Τίμωνα; Planudes Καλλιμάχου εἰς αὐτόν.

1 σκότος ἢ φάος P φάος ἢ σκότος Plan. 2 ὑμέων γὰρ Plan. ὑμείων P Brunck

Timon, since you are no more, which is hateful to you, darkness rather than light?
“Darkness. For there are more of you people in Hades.”

This second Timon epigram differs from the others in the *AP*, which are constructed as Timon’s tombstone with an inscription intended to repel passersby. All are similarly ironic in that the misanthropic character of the dead man is illustrated by the inscriptions themselves. In contrast, this epigram is a dialogue initiated by an anonymous speaker who interrogates Timon about the afterlife in a manner like that of epigram 13 on Charidas (which also ends with the phrase εἰν Αἴδη). The speaker expects Timon, in keeping with his previously expressed hatred for all men, to prefer being dead as a means of avoiding hateful men, but unexpectedly Timon rejects Hades. The irony of Timon’s answer is double-edged. To be alive is what most people surely would prefer but it undermines Timon’s uniquely antisocial character.

Prima facie both of Callimachus’ epigrams are about Timon the misanthrope (and are so labeled in the *AP*), but since these epigrams were only included in collections well after Callimachus wrote them it is worth considering the suggestions of S. White and D. Clayman (made independently of each other) that Callimachus’ original subject of this epigram was not Timon the Athenian misanthrope but the Pyrrhonian Skeptic philosopher, Timon of Phlius, a contemporary of Callimachus, with whom the Athenian Timon was often conflated (Bertram 1923: 38–40). The Skeptic Timon was known for his biting critiques of other philosophers. His now lost poetic work, the *Silloi*, was said to have been partly modeled on *Odyssey*, book 11, when Odysseus visits the Underworld and engages with various dead heroes. That could account for the fact that this is the only one of the epigrams in the Timon series that interrogates Timon, who replies as among the dead. White observes that Callimachus was not the only Alexandrian poet to write epigrams about philosophers (see epigram 10 on Timarchus, epigram 23 on Cleombrotus, fr. 1 on Diodorus Cronus; Posidippus ep. 89 A-B mentions the Academy and ep. 104 A-B Menedemus of Eretria; and Theaetetus writes on Crantor of Soli).

1. οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἐσσί: the irony of conversing with someone who “no longer exists” plays on the conceit of sepulchral epigrams conversing with the passersby to inform them about the inhabitant of the tomb or cenotaph. Here, the speaker knows it is Timon’s tomb, which prompts his question.

ἐσσί: Epic and Doric for εἶ.

τί τοι (= σοι): the expression is common in Homer and less so in later hexameter poetry. Callimachus uses it at *hDelos* 29 also in a question: τί τοι θυμῆρες ἀκοῦσαι; “what is pleasing for you to hear?”

σκότος ἢ φάος: i.e., “dead” or “alive”.

τί...ἐχθρόν: literally “what is hateful to you...” but the sense is “which of the two is more hateful...” brought out by the adverb of comparison ἤ. Given Timon’s character, the expected answer would be φάος, but since more have died over time than are still alive on the earth, there are even more people for Timon to loathe in Hades.

2. ὑμέων: although they print ὑμέων, G-P point out that P’s ὑμείων is a “good Homeric form, and Brunck, perhaps rightly, accepted it and omitted γάρ”. But the final phrase with ὑμέων γὰρ πλείονες provides a nice balance and contrast to the opening: οὐ γὰρ ἔτ' ἐσσί. Timon, who always shunned people, not only cannot escape them in death, but is now one of a large crowd.

πλείονες: G-P 2. 203 observe that “C. is thinking of” οἱ πλείονες = “the Majority” as a well-known euphemism for the dead (see LSJ πλείων I 2).

εἶν = ἐν; the variant is frequent for metrical purposes.

Bertram (1906) 38–40.

Clayman (2007) 505.

Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 327.

Gutzwiller (1998) 197–198.

Sens (2020) 33, 139–140.

Tueller (2008) 115.

White (1994) 145–146.