

23 — Cleombrotus | 53 G-P

Εἶπας “Ἥλιε χαῖρε” Κλεόμβροτος ὠμβρακιώτης
ἦλατ’ ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῦ τείχεος εἰς Αἴδην,
ἄξιον οὐδὲν ἰδὼν θανάτου κακόν, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος
ἐν τὸ περὶ ψυχῆς γράμμ’ ἀναλεξάμενος.

Sources: AP 7.471 [C] Καλλιμάχου [J] εἰς Κλεόμβροτον τὸν Ἀμβρακιώτην; Planudes without attribution; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 1.48; Ammonius, in *Porphyrii isagogen CAG* 4.3.4.22–25 Busse; Elias, in *Porphyrii isagogen commentarium CAG* 18.1.14.4–7 Busse; David, *Prolegomena philosophiae CAG* 18.2.31.29–33 Busse; scholia on Dionysius Thrax, *Gr. Gr.* 1.3.160.12–18 Hilgard; Choeroboscus in Theodosii, *Gr. Gr.* 4.2.125.17–18 (repeated at 128.15–16 and 139.14 Hilgard); sch. Dionys. Thrax *Gr. Gr.* 1.3.3.22–23 Hilgard, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος...ἀναλεξάμενος; Herennius Philo, *De diversis verborum significationibus* γ 43.9–10 Palmieri, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος...ἀναλεξάμενος.

1 εἶπας P Plan. πων suprascriptum Plan. φαεινὲ ante Κλεόμβροτος inseruit sch. Dionys. (εἶπας om. O, χαῖρε om. C) ὠμβρακιώτης C Plan. ὠμβρακιώτας P η supra α ante ς scripsit C ἀμβρακιώτης Ammonius Elias David ἀμπρακιώτης Plan. ante corr., Sext. sch. Dionys. 2 ἦλατ’ P ἦλλατ’ C Αἴδην cett. Αἶδαν P 3 ἄξιον οὔτι παθὼν sch. Dionys. Elias David θανάτου κακόν P θανάτου τέλος Sext. ἀλλὰ Plan. ἢ τὸ P 4 ἐν τὸ Plan. Sext. ἐν τῷ P

Upon saying “farewell sun” Cleombrotus of Ambracia
leapt from a high wall into Hades,
seeing nothing bad that merited death, but upon reading
one work of Plato – the *On the Soul*.

Spoken by an ambiguous narrator, this is a mock epitaph for one Cleombrotus, who commits suicide after reading Plato’s treatise *On the Soul* (the ancient name of the *Phaedo*). Because Plato does not mention that Cleombrotus is an Ambraciote (as Callimachus does), scholars have questioned whether Callimachus intends a reference to Plato’s figure. But the entire epigram is set up in such a way that the identification is difficult to avoid. We begin with a Cleombrotus throwing himself from a wall into Hades, while the last two lines direct the reader’s attention to Plato’s dialogue with ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος in the emphatic position not only at the end of the line but at the opening of the capping phrase. By specifically naming Plato in line 3 and the dialogue in line 4, Callimachus encourages his readers to contextualize the epigram in terms of the *Phaedo*. Cleombrotus’ absence at Socrates’ death (59c2) provides a plausible reason for reading the *Phaedo*’s narrative of it and discovering in the text Socrates’ expectations about the afterlife. Cleombrotus’ absence also has prompted what could be an explanation for his suicide. In *On Style* 288, Demetrius (though without mention of this epigram) argues that Plato’s remark that Aristippus and

Cleombrotus were absent from the deathbed was to chide these men because they were “feasting in Aegina” (ἐν Αἰγίνῃ ὀψοφαγοῦντες) while Socrates lay on his deathbed. Thus, a repentant Cleombrotus might take his own life (for a discussion and rejection of the likelihood of this view see Williams 1995: 155–156). But in doing so, Cleombrotus seems to have misread the dialogue, which forbids taking one’s own life (61e5–62c9). Callimachus’ anecdote plays out a central fear about the written word that Plato (via Socrates) expresses in the *Phaedrus* (275a1–276a10), namely that without the corrective that dialogue can provide, the act of reading is incapable of preventing misunderstanding.

While the epigram needs no earlier model for its interpretation, the opening of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* offers a thought-provoking set of circumstances: Dionysus, having just read Euripides’ *Andromeda* forms a sudden desire to descend to Hades to see Euripides. (52–54: ἀναγινώσκοντί μοι | τὴν Ἀνδρομέδαν πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν ἐξαίφνης πόθος | τὴν καρδίαν ἐπάταξε, “when I was reading the *Andromeda* to myself a sudden desire seized my heart”). Among the means of descent proposed are hemlock (124) and leaping from a tower (129–132). If the *Frogs* is indeed an intertext, then another way to read the epigram is to assume that Cleombrotus decided to die so that he might speak with the now dead Socrates.

Callimachus’ anecdote about Cleombrotus’ suicide seems to have acquired a life of its own—as G-P observe (2. 204) in some sources Cleombrotus becomes a μενράκιον or even a παῖς. The epigram was cited by both grammatical and philosophical writers. In the first group, Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 1.48), in discussing the derivation of the term γραμματική, claims that it is derived from γράμμα = a letter of the alphabet, but he presents as an alternative that it was derived from γράμμα as when it is used as a synecdoche for a composition. To support his argument, he cites Callimachus’ use of γράμμα in the Creophylus epigram for a poetic work (see 6 above, n.4) and in this epigram to describe a prose work. Sextus cites an Asclepiades (ὥς φασιν οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἀσκληπιάδην), presumably the late second or early first-century grammarian from Myrlea, as his source. The fact that the scholia on Dionysius Thrax also quote these poems in service of similar arguments suggests that they too were derived from Asclepiades of Myrlea or at least a very early source (on which see Hunter’s recent discussion 2019: 173–175 = 2021b: 288–289). To this list we can add a fragment of Herennius Philo (of Byblos, c. 64–141) later epitomized by Ammonius Grammaticus; Herennius quotes the final lines of 23 in his treatise on diverse meanings of words (Περὶ διαφόρους σημασίας); his argument is virtually the same as that which appears in the later writers.

In Greek, the philosophical strand appears later, in the work of Ammonius of Alexandria, the fifth century CE commentator on Aristotle, who also wrote on Platonic texts, including the *Phaedo*. In his discussion of the saying that “philosophy is

the practice for death” (φιλοσοφία ἐστὶ μελέτη θανάτου), a paraphrase of Socrates’ remark in the *Phaedo* (67e4–5: οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀποθνήσκειν μελετῶσι), he quotes the epigram with this introduction:

Κλεόμβροτος γάρ τις ὀνόματι ἐγκύψας τῷ Πλάτῳ Φαίδῳ καὶ ὅτι μὲν δεῖ τὸν φιλόσοφον θάνατον μελετᾶν γνούς, ὅτῳ δὲ δεῖ τὸν μὴ γνούς, ἀνελθὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ τείχους ἑαυτὸν κατεκρήμισε. τούτου μαρτύριον ὁ τὸ εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ Ἀμβρακιωτικὸν μειράκιον ἐκθέμενος ἐπίγραμμα ποιητής· φησὶ γάρ...

CAG 4.3.4.18–21 Busse

A certain Cleombrotus by name, on looking into Plato’s *Phaedo* and recognizing that it was necessary for the philosopher to practice death, but not recognizing in what way he should do this, going up onto a wall threw himself down. Evidence of this is the poet who composes an epigram on this same Ambraciote youth; he says...

Ammonius defends Plato/Socrates by claiming that Cleombrotus was a “youth” who misunderstood the master. His fellow Neoplatonists David and Elias quote the epigram as well, quite obviously borrowing from this earlier discussion, while Olympiodorus (*In Platonis Alcibiadem commentarii* 5.3) can refer casually to τοῦ Ἀμβρακικοῦ μειράκιου. Cleombrotus’ leap is mentioned in Agathias (*AP* 11.354.17–18: εἰ δ’ ἐθέλεις, τὸν παῖδα Κλεόμβροτον Ἀμβρακιώτην | μιμοῦ, καὶ τεγέων σὸν δέμας ἐκχάλασον, “If you want, imitate the boy Cleombrotus of Ambracia, and let your body drop down from a roof”) and in the Byzantine, pseudo-Lucianic *Philopatris* §1, the speaker Critias recalls “Cleombrotus’ leap” (τὸ τοῦ Κλεομβρότου πήδημα).

Roman sources were familiar with the epigram from at least the time of Cicero, who paraphrases it at *Tusculan Disputations* 1.84, as part of a discussion of the permissibility of suicide, and in *pro Scauro* 4, as part of an attack against Scaurus’ claim that his wife committed suicide (see Williams 1995: 163–166 for a discussion of these passages). Ovid seems to allude to it in the *Ibis* 493–494: *vel de praecipiti venias in Tartara saxo* | *ut qui Socraticum de nece legit opus* (“Or may you go from a precipice to a rock in Tartarus as he who read a Socratic work on death”). For later Christian writers “Cleombrotus’ leap” becomes a convenient exemplum in critiques of pagan philosophers, particularly Plato, who are regarded as encouraging suicide; these include Lactantius (*Divine Institutions* 3.18.9), Augustine (*City of God* 1.22), Jerome (*Letter to Paul* 39.3), and Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oration* 4.70), on which see Sinko 1905.

1. **εἵπας**: α-forms of the aorist (analogous to the sigmatic aorist) occur alongside the usual thematic forms and become more common in the Hellenistic Period. These alternative forms of εἶπον also occur in epigrams 45.1 (εἶπα) and 46.8 (εἶπαι).

Ἥλιε χαῖρε: this salutation seems unique to Callimachus, though the fact that it occurs later in magic papyri (*PGM* 7.1017, 22a18, 81.2) suggests that it was a familiar, possibly ritual expression. It is double-edged in that χαῖρε is used both as an initial greeting and as “farewell” as here (and see epigram 3, n.1). For a similar greeting to mark a tragic event see Euripides’ *Alcestis* 244, where she addresses the sun as she enters the stage for the first time (Ἄλιε καὶ φάος ἡμέρας) and Ajax in Sophocles’ play, who calls upon Ἥλιε (846) to announce his fate to his parents (Garulli 2007: 327–331).

Κλέομβροτος: the name (κλέος ἄμβροτον) means “undying fame” (so Meyer 2005: 166 n.126), something that Plato’s and Callimachus’ writings have guaranteed.

ὠμβρακιώτης (= ὁ Ἀμβρακιώτης). Ambracia lies in the extreme south of Epirus.

2. **ἦλατ’...εἰς Αἶδην:** the expression is imitated in *AP* 7.607.6, attributed to Palladas.

3. **ἀλλά:** the text of Planudes; P has ἦ τὸ; although Pfeiffer expressed doubts about the reading, it is clear on the manuscript.

4. **περὶ ψυχῆς:** one of the ancient titles of the *Phaedo*, so P. Oxy. 17.2087, 22: Πλάτων Περὶ ψυχῆς.

γράμμι’ ἀναλεξάμενος: Sens 2011: 218 points out that ἀναλέγομαι is first used in the sense of “read” here and in Asclepiades (*AP* 9.63.3 = 32.3 G-P, Sens), also with γράμμα (τίς οὐκ ἀνελέξατο Λύδην | τὸ ξυνὸν Μουσῶν γράμμα καὶ Αντιμάχου, “Who has not read the *Lyde*, a joint writing of the Muses and Antimachus?”). The phrase appears again in a cult hymn to Isis written by the Graeco-Egyptian priest Isidorus in the first century BCE. He may be quoting Callimachus, but more likely both are drawing upon the same technical language of reading “sacred” texts. Isidorus in describing the builder of the temple to Hermouthis quotes “those who have read the sacred writings” (οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν γράμμι’ ἀναλεξάμενοι, *Hymn* 4.18, p. 63 Vanderlip).

Bettenworth (2007) 80–83.

Cairns (2016) 66–68.

Carlini (1999a) 73–79 and (1999b) 47–60.

Garulli (2007) 325–336.

Gutzwiller (1998) 205–206.

Hunter (2019) 172–179 = (2021b) 287–293.

Kirstein (2012) 205–213.

Lehnus (2004a) = (2016) 214–216.

Meillier (1979) 196–197.

Merkelbach/Cazzaniga (1965) 299–300.

Sinko (1905) 1–10.

Spina (1989) 12–39.

White (1994) 135–161.

Williams (1995) 154–169.