

On the Text of the Hipponium Tablet

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WE OFFER HERE a few remarks on the text of the largest and oldest of the inscribed so-called “Orphic” or “Dionysiac” gold-foil initiation tablets, that found at Hipponium in south Italy in a grave datable to the late fifth or very early fourth century.¹ The text is in Doric but has been translated, it is generally agreed, from an original composed in epic-Ionic.²

1. *The use of a damaged model?*

For reference we give, from the published photographs, our transcription of the tablet, here with the lines articulated into words for the reader’s convenience, and in bold type words that are inscribed irregularly or generally considered corrupt.³ The transcription is not intended as innovative or controversial.

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 1 | μναμοσυνας τοδε εριοι ν επει αμ μελλεισι θανεσθαι | |
| 2 | εις αιδαο δομος ευερεας εστ επι δ(ε)ξια κρηνα | τυξ |
| 3 | παρ δ αυταν εστακνα λευκα κυπαρισσος | |
| 4 | ενθα κατερχομεναι ψυκαι νεκνον ψυχονται | αρ |
| 5 | ταυτας ταρ κρηνας μεδε σχεδον ενγυθεν ελθεις | |
| 6 | προσθεν δε ηευρεσεις τας μναμοσυνας απο λιμνας | |

¹ G. Foti and G. Pugliese Carratelli, “Un sepolcro a Hipponium e un nuovo testo orfico,” *ParPass* 29 (1974) 91–126 (A. Bernabé, *Poetae epici graeci, testimonia et fragmenta* II.2 *Orphicorum et orphicis similibus testimonia et fragmenta* [Berlin 2005: henceforth *OFBem*] 474). Dates here are B.C. unless otherwise noted.

² See A. C. Cassio, “Πιέναι e il modello ionico della laminetta di Hipponium,” in A. C. Cassio and P. Poccetti (eds.), *Forme di religiosità e tradizioni sapienziali in Magna Grecia* (Pisa/Rome 1994) 183–205.

³ We have gratefully made use of the excellent photographs and observations offered by G. Sacco, “Γῆς παῖς εἰμι. Sul v. 10 della laminetta di Hipponium,” *ΖΡΕ* 137 (2001) 27–33.

- 7 ψυχρον υδορ προρεον φυλακες δε ελυπερθεν εασι
 8 τοι δε σε ειρεσονται εν φρασι πευκαλιμιασι
 9 οτι δε εξερεεις αιδος σκοτος οροεεντος
 10 ειπον γεσ παι εμι και ορανο αστεροεντος
 11 διψαι δ εμ αυος και απολλυμαι αλα δοτ οκ[α]
 12 ψυχρον υδορ π^{αα}ιεναι τεσ μνεμοσυνες απο λιμνες
 13 και δε τοι ερεοσιν ιυποχθονιοι βασιλει
 14 και δε τοι δοσοσι πιεν τασ μναμοσυνας απο λιμνας
 15 και δε τοι συ πιον ηοδον ερχεα ηαν τε και αλλοι
 16 μυστα και βαχχοι ηιεραν στειχοσι κλεινοι

1 τοδε εριον: non-metrical 2 δ(ε)ξια for δεξια: an example of “Abbreviated writing?” (R. Wachter, *Kadmos* 30 [1991] 49–80) κρενα an anomaly: an Ionic archetype would have had κρένε; a fully Doric translation, κράνα 3 τῆς a lectional note? 4 ψυκαι (for ψυχαι): υ corr. from χα αρ (ρ or ο) a lectional note? a number (1090/1070? 91/71?) ψυχονται: ψ corr. from a round letter 5 τασ or γαρ or παρ 8 ενι 9 οροεεντος for ορφνοέεντος? (ε or ο); cf. *OFBern* 475.11 (Sicily) ὀρφ{ο}νήεντος<ς>? Note C. Russo, *ParPass* 47 (1992) 181–182 10 παις 12 λιμνες, but why the Ionic dialect of τεσ μνεμοσυνες ... λ.? 13 ηυποχθονιοι 14 τασ μναμοσυνας results in a heptameter, θείης no doubt once standing in the archetype: cf. *OFBern* 476.10 (Petelia; *infra* n.6) 15 ερχεαι

Most mistakes on the tablet occur in clusters, as we see above. This suggests a written model set out in *stichoi* that was damaged, perhaps from rough creases: hence presumably the poor readings or conjectures by a scribe copying the damaged model and trying to fill in the gaps on his own.⁴ Much has been written about the nature and origin of these mistakes, a general assumption being a misremembering on the part of someone who had the hexameters in his head: “Forgetfulness in the Golden Tablets of Memory” is the striking title of an important discussion by Richard Janko, for example.⁵ Memory and forgetfulness to be sure will have had some part in the transmission of the verses of these instructions, but neither need have

⁴ We suspect that a good deal more of verse 2 was damaged than we show above. Compare the Hipponian text with the Petelian and the Pharsalian (*OFBern* 476, 477):

Hipp. 2 εις Αΐδαο δόμος ευερέας, ἔστ' ἐπὶ δ(ε)ξιά κρένα

Petelia 1 εὐρήσσεις δ' Αΐδαο δόμων ἐπ' ἀριστερὰ κρήνην

Phars. 1 εὐρήσσεις δ' Αΐδαο δόμων ἐνδέξια κρήνην

⁵ *CQ* 34 (1984) 89–100.

come into play if the models used by copyists had been full and legible. If a scribe, setting out to fill in the gaps of a damaged model, had remembered the poem better, results such as the Hipponian text would themselves no doubt be better; the tablet itself evidences, in any case, a transmission primarily through copyists, not memorizers.⁶ The letters]τοδεγραψ[on another of the gold-foil tablets (*OFBern* 476.13, Petelia, 4th cent.) also suggest that the verses were associated with a written text (see 292 *infra*), and they seem to refer to a written rather than an oral tradition.⁷

2. Verse 1

The letters EPION (cf. ε(ἰ)ριον “wool,” ἦριον “burial mound”) as they stand are unmetrical and in the context meaningless, as most editors acknowledge. The consensus, however, which is that they represent a substantive, is in any

⁶ An illustration is Hipponium 14, a heptameter in which τὰς Μναμοσύνας is the sinner: we expect ∞. Comparison with the Petelian and Pharsalian forms is instructive:

Hipp. 14 καὶ δέ τοι δόσοσι πέν {τὰς Μναμοσύνας} ἀπὸ λίμνας		
Petelia 1 καὶ τ<οί> σ<ο>ι δώσουσι πείν θείης		ἀπ[ὸ κρή?]νης
Phars. 1 <	> πέν <	> ἀπὸ {τῆς} κρήνης

The θείης at Petelia no doubt reflects the archetype. The scribe at Pharsalus evidently had a model from which this word had dropped out, the phrase no longer being recognized as verse: hence that scribe's or a predecessor's insertion, presumably, of τῆς. Apparently the scribe at Hipponium, or whoever prepared the model used, also had a text with its θείης damaged or missing, and unsuccessfully undertook to supply what the sense required. In other words, the errors that the texts from Hipponium and Pharsalus show here spring from a single defective written model.

⁷ Among editors there is no consensus as to the immediate context of these letters. M. West, “Zum neuen Goldplättchen aus Hipponion,” *ZPE* 18 (1975) 229–236, at 232, early proposed [ἐν πίνακι χρυσῷ] τόδε γραψ[άτω ἡδὲ φορεῖτω], assuming the clause to be modified by what immediately precedes on the Petelian tablet, a verse ending ἐπὶν μέλλησι θανείσθ[αι] that is evidently a congener of Hipponium 1. The third-person μέλλησι, however, is in our view to be doubted in all witnesses (292–293 *infra*), and West's φορεῖτω, with its contracted form, requires defense. May we think of combining Petelia 13 - - - τόδε γραψ[] and Sicily 2 μ[ε]μνημέ<ν>ος ἦρως and of restoring [Ὀρφεὺς (or Βάκχος) γὰρ] τὸδ' ἔγραψ[εν ἐμοὶ μ[ε]μνημένος ἦρως?

case awkward.⁸ The first question to ask is whether the first verse is a continuous sentence or not.

There are problems if it *is* and if the letters represent a substantive:

(a) The sentence would be of the shape *This (is) the X of Y, whenever (or since) he/she/it is about to do Z*. In any such sentence, the subject of the subordinate clause is naturally X or Y. Neither Mnemosyne (X) nor her EPION (Y), let us agree, is about to die (Z): the subject has shifted. That it should go unstated in the preserved text is a difficulty.

(b) The statement that *this (is) the X of Y* is presumably intended as true always, not only whenever (or since) something is about to happen.

There are problems if it *is not*—i.e. if there is to be a full stop after *this (is) the X of Y*, with the ἐπεὶ ἄν ... clause modifying what follows:

(c) The text of 2 ff. tells the reader what to do and to say *after death*, not “whenever (or since) s/he is about to die.”

(d) The instructions in the body of the Hipponian text (2 ff.) are in the 2nd person, not the 3rd as μέλλῃσι “is about” would demand. The first verse is hardly likely to be addressed to some other reader. We expect μέλλῃσι.⁹

The opening verse can in fact be a single connected sentence, though, if its main clause has a verb of action that can be modified with the subordinate clause. The letters EPION seem a

⁸ Proposed emendations and interpretations: δῶρον, (φ)έργον, θρίον, σῆμα, *σρίον, and the metrically impossible ἐπίον, ἔριον (= Ion. εἴριον), {ε}ρίον, ἠρίον, and ηιερόν. See G. Scalera McClintock, “Sul v. 1 della laminetta di Hipponion,” *ParPass* 39 (1984) 132–135.

⁹ The awkwardness brought Pugliese Carratelli in the ed. pr. (*ParPass* 29 [1974] 112) to speculate that μέλλῃσι might even be 2nd-person, comparing the ending of 2nd sg. epic-Ionic and Doric ἔσσι, Aeolic ἔσσι, and Epidauric συντίθησι, and referring to C. D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects*⁴ (Chicago 1968) §138.1; he is followed by M. Guarducci, “Laminette auree orfiche: alcuni problemi,” *Epigraphica* 36 (1974) 7–31, at 21, and *Epigrafia greca* IV (Rome 1978) 263, “Poiché tu sia in procinto di morire.” Cf. however G. Zuntz, “Die Goldlamelle von Hipponion,” *WS N.F.* 10 (1976) 129–151, at 135: “Man soll wohl τις ergänzen ... Es ist aber sehr begreiflich, dass P(ugliese) C(arratelli) für die 2. Pers. Sing. plädierte, denn im folgenden ist ja durchweg der Träger der Lamelle in der 2. Person angeredet.”

good place to look. A possibility would be an aorist imperative, e.g. ἄειρον¹⁰ “take up this (sc. book?) of Mnemosyne,” or, if “this” without a noun is not to be countenanced,¹¹ μνημόσυνον τὸδ’ ἄειρον “take up this reminder/memorandum” (here in Ionic spelling). LSJ s.v. μνημόσυνον, where there is no hint of a use of the word in verse before the first century, might discourage such a conjecture, were the noun not however found in this initial position in a verse of an elegiac couplet of a funerary monument of the fifth century (*CEG* I 153, Amorgos),

Ἀντὶ γυναικὸς ἐγὼ Παρίο λίθο ἐντάδι κείμαι
μνημόσυνον Βίπτης, μητρὶ δακρυτὸν ἄχος.

The level of doggerel shows that the noun was easily conceivable at verse-beginning in early metrical production.¹² The Hipponian EPION, whatever its original, suggests that the damage to a model extended to the upper edge of its text; damage in this area could well have affected also the last letters of the nearby word ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝΟΝ (or ΜΝΑΜΟΣΥΝΟΝ if the

¹⁰ We have found only one instance of this form, Theoc. 22.65 εἷς ἐνὶ χεῖρας ἄειρον ἐναντίος ἀνδρὶ καταστάς. Mere coincidence is not to be ruled out, but ἄειρον, if it occurs in the archetype of the Hipponian text, would have the same position within the verse there and in Theocritus and also would immediately follow its object. We may compare the position of the same verb in the verse *CEG* I 456 Εὐμάστας με ἄειρον ἀπὸ χθονὸς ἡο Κριτοβόλο (Thera, 6th cent.?), where it also immediately follows its object. We must bear in mind that in their vocabulary and word-positions producers of early verse inscriptions were traditional rather than innovative.

¹¹ From a correspondent whose judgment about Greek we value: “Could even this chap say ‘Take up this of Mnemosyne’? Of course, with these blighters almost anything is possible!” It may be doubted, however, whether we should condemn the composers of these verses on the basis of vicissitudes of transmission.

¹² The results of an electronic search for ΜΝΗΜΟΣΥΝ- and ΜΝΑΜΟΣΥΝ- in *AP* and *App.Anth.* may be significant. 13 examples appeared, all at the beginnings of hexameters (*AP* 12.86.7, *App.Anth.* 286.7, 310.a3), of pentameters (*AP* 4.1.14, 5.136.4, 5.166.4, 7.465.8, *App.Anth.* 13.6), or of the second halves of pentameters (*AP* 6.341.2, *App.Anth.* 221.4, 477.4, 664.2, 673.6). One of these, *AP* 6.341.2, was quoted by Herodotus (4.88) from an epigram recording the dedication to Hera by Darius’ Samian architect Mandrocles of his bridge across the Hellespont, therefore another early use of the noun in this presumably emphatic position.

damage occurred after the translation into West Greek) and forced the scribe to decide how the word should end; and he, in turn, may have been influenced by the name Mnemosyne in 6 and 12.¹³ In any case, “of Mnemosyne,” though never questioned by any editor, yields no clear sense.

There remains the difficulty (d) of the 3rd-person verb in ΜΕΛΛΕΙΣΙ ΘΑΝΕΣΘΑΙ. Here it seems to be the result of a scribe’s misinterpreting his model, not necessarily miscopying it, for he has assumed a contracted infinitive, θανείσθαι. The tablet was found, though, in a tomb of ca. 400, its text including manifest corruptions that bespeak an older archetype. Are we to assume, as do apparently all editors, that an archetype composed in the fifth century or earlier in epic meter had a contracted form rather than the traditional θανέεσθαι? Indeed, an electronic search for θανέεσθαι in hexametric verse reveals eleven instances in all, eight at verse-end as here.¹⁴ (It does produce two instances of θανείσθαι, but one is very late, the other questionable: see n.17). We have seen the early spellings of vowels in the text. Pierre Chantraine has urged that very early manuscripts of Homer could also have had Ε as a grapheme for ě;,¹⁵ if this is true of the written exemplar of the

¹³ Was this the scribe or redactor who wrongly (*supra* n.6) thought of 14 τῆς Μνημοσύνης (or τὰς Μναμοσύνας) for a lost θεΐης (or θεΐας)?

¹⁴ At verse-end: *Il.* 4.12, 15.728, *Od.* 20.21, *Ap.* Rhod. 2.626, *Theoc.* 22.18, *Quint. Smyrn.* 1.77, 10.51, 13.225—three of these with the phrase οἰόμενος/ν θανέεσθαι, semantically similar to that in *Hipp.* 1. Elsewhere: *Quint. Smyrn.* 3.249, 10.299, 13.269.

¹⁵ P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* I² (Paris 1958) 7; cf. e.g. the vulgate κλεαανδρων (κλέα ἀνδρῶν edd.) at *Il.* 9.189, 534, *Od.* 8.73, δυσκλεααργος (δυσκλέα Ἄργος edd.) at *Il.* 2.115, 9.22, where the earliest MSS. would have had ΚΛΕΑΝΔΡΟΝ, ΔΥΣΚΛΕΑΡΓΟΣ: the correct “book” articulations, he submits, would no doubt be κλέε’ ἀνδρῶν, δύσκλεε’ Ἄργος, the single Ε here representing the doubleton. So too with σπέος: editors assume, awkwardly, gen. sg. σπέους, dat. sg. σπήι, dat. pl. σπέσσι and σπήεσσι; Chantraine urges that one would have pronounced σπέεος instead of the impossible σπέιους (which editors assume in their articulation περὶ σπέιους γλαφυροῖο of *Od.* 5.68 ΠΕΡΙΣΠΕΟΣΓΛΑΦΥΡΟΙΟ), and that instead of the vulgate σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι (*Od.* 1.15, 73, etc.), early spelling would have had ΣΠΕΣΙΓΛΑΦΥΡΟΙΣΙ, the dat. pl. being pronounced σπέεσσι. Cf. also the vulgate *Il.* 10.376, 15.4 δείους, to be understood, according to Chantraine,

Hipponian text and its congeners, whoever reproduced it and passed it down, no doubt confronted with the 2nd-person verb in ΕΠΕΑΝ ΜΕΛΛΕΙΣ ΘΑΝΕΣΘΑΙ “whenever you are about to die” (as we should conjecture) and evidently inattentive to early writing convention and concerned mainly to make the letter-sequence fit the meter, would likely have “corrected” its apparent $\sim \sim |^4 - - |^5 - \sim |^6 - x$ in the easiest available way, by adding another short syllable to the fifth foot, thereby producing an unthematic 3rd-person μέλλῃσι.¹⁶ (The contraction θανείσθαι does appear in the cognate Petelia 12 and perhaps in Sicily 1,¹⁷ but this is no argument *contra*: once models with ΜΕΛΛΕΙΣΙ began to circulate, there could be little hope that any copyist, undertaking to modernize the archaic spelling ΘΑΝΕΣΘΑΙ, might see in the latter anything other than a

as the old genitive *δέεος, and the vulgate 16.20 Πατροκλείς ἰππεύ, concealing the early spelling ΠΑΤΡΟΚΛΕΣ, to be understood as Πατροόκλεες. As far as we are aware, only one reviewer of the book has expressed any reservation on this point, A. Debrunner, *MusHelv* 2 (1945) 197–200, who noted that he knew of no epigraphic example of E for ἔῃ. Indeed, there is no example in *CEG* I, but as chance has it there is only one occasion for such spelling, 19.1 [– ∞]ς αἰγμετῶ Χοῦνὸκλέῃς, ἀνδρὸς / [έπισ]τάς, from an Athenian statue base. It is not necessarily representative in that its conspicuously uncontracted EE for εε in the ending of the name is intended as a noticeably mannered Ionic, as is the lengthened first syllable of Χοῦνὸκλέῃς. It is accordingly not evidence, to be sure, that EE was the only early way to represent εε, but it suggests rather that had the stone been inscribed -ΚΛΕΣ the casual Attic reader might well have assumed -κλής and have seen no intentional Ionism. E understood as a grapheme of a possible combination other than EE may explain the corrupt contraction θανείσθαι (n.18 *infra*) in the transmitted text of Simonides/Semonides (if indeed the original can be as early as Stobaeus states).

¹⁶ J. Gil, “Epigraphica III,” *CuadFilClás* 14 (1978) 83–120, at 83–85, also regards the second iota as intrusive. He too prefers an uncontracted infinitive, articulating μέλλῃσι{ι}θα νέεσθαι “you are about to go” and instancing κλεινοί for the likelier κλεινοί in verse 16; this has the additional advantage of eliminating the 3rd-person ending of the verb. So far however the middle voice of μέλλω has been quotable only in prose.

¹⁷ The printing of the ed. pr., J. Frel, “Una nuova laminella ‘orfica,’” *Éirene* 30 (1994) 183–184, is so bad as to suggest that the author had no opportunity to correct proofs; the infinitive in the first verse appears on the page as θανιέσθαι, for example. Alas, the edition had no photographs or drawings for controlling the published transcription.

contracted infinitive.)¹⁸ If the “correcting” scribe had been alert enough to recognize that his model had simply a conventional spelling of θανέεσθαι and that its fifth foot needed no repair, he might have spared us the phantom of a 3rd-person verb.

Exempli gratia, in any case, a proposal for the archetype of Hipponium 1, which we offer in the textbook Ionic spelling of today:

Μνημόσυνον τόδ’ ἄειρον, ἐπὴν μέλλῃς θανέεσθαι.

This reminder take up, whenever you are about to die.

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¹⁸ Of the two hexameter instances of θανείσθαι quotable from outside the gold-foil tablets, each is at the end of the first verse of an elegiac couplet. They invite attention. One, ἀλλ’ εἰ μὴ Σπεύσιπτον ἐμάνθανον ὦδε θανείσθαι, is claimed as his own by Diogenes Laertius (4.3), whose late date may account for an inattention to epic tradition; meter shows the contraction to be of his own doing, in any case. In the other, οὔτε γὰρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχει γηρασέμεν οὔτε θανείσθαι, attributed by Stobaeus to Simonides (fr.20.7 West²) or Semonides, such late contraction in the Stobaeus manuscripts may well be a scribe’s corruption if the original verse is as early as either poet. For example, meter does not guarantee the preserved θανείσθαι, for the poet may have intended οὐ θανέεσθαι, even if οὔτε ... οὐ is apparently not attested in extant hexameters: in trimeters, though, we find Aesch. *PV* 479–480 οὔτε βρώσιμον, οὐ χριστόν, Soph. *Ant.* 249–250 οὔτε του γενήδος ἦν / πλήγμ’, οὐ δικέλλης ἐκβολή, Eur. *Or.* 41–42 οὔτε σῖτα διὰ δέξης ἐδέξατο, / οὐ λούτρ’ ἔδωκε χρωτί, cf. 46–47 μήθ’ ἡμᾶς στέγαις, / μὴ πυρὶ δέχεσθαι, etc. If these iambic parallels are pertinent, then the diagnosis of the corruption, if corruption it is, may be like that of ΜΕΛΛΕΙΣΙΘΑΝΕΣΘΑΙ: the scribe, confronted with ΟΥ (or Ο) ΘΑΝΕΣΘΑΙ and not knowing how to interpret the E, made the wrong choice, οὐ θανείσθαι, which, as he must have then seen, left the fifth foot short (⁵ - ~ | ⁶ - x); this too apparently he undertook to remedy, by filling out the foot with another short syllable, οὔτε θανείσθαι.