

“But who art thou?”: Callimachus and the Unsatisfactory Epitaph

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CALLIMACHUS’ reader-response epitaph for Timonoe runs as follows (*Anth.Pal.* 7.522 / 40 G.-P. / 15 Pf.):

Τιμονόη. – τίς δ’ ἔσσι; μὰ δαίμονας οὐ σ’ ἄν ἐπέγνω
εἰ μὴ Τιμοθέου πατρὸς ἐπὴν ὄνομα
στήλῃ καὶ Μήθυμνα, τεῖ πόλις. ἦ μέγα φημί
χῆρον ἀνιάσθαι σὸν πόσιν Εὐθυμένη.

The standard explanation is neatly summarised by Gow and Page: “The speaker, seeing the name Timonoe on a gravestone and reading further, discovers from the rest of the inscription that the grave is that of an acquaintance or friend.”¹ This is certainly the meaning assumed in the translation of Paton:²

Timonoe! But who art thou? By heaven I would not have recognised thee, had not thy father’s name Timotheus and thy city’s Methymna stood on the grave-stone. I know of a truth that thy widowed husband Euthymenes is in sore distress.

Passing by the grave of *a* Timonoe, the speaker realises she is *that* Timonoe; the epigram articulates the horror of discovering by accident the death of a friend—more easily imagined for a modern reader, perhaps, as a Facebook post stumbled across during a coffee break.

Even with Paton’s translation there is an intriguing uncertainty. Did the speaker already know Timonoe was dead? In other words, have we discovered her death, or only her resting-place? Paton translates ἦ ... φημί “I know of a truth,” which could convey either “Timonoe, I knew you were dead, and I

¹ A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *HE* II (Cambridge 1965) 195.

² W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology* II (Cambridge [Mass.] 1917) 283.

have seen your husband's grief; I was not expecting to encounter your tomb" or "Timonoe, I did *not* know you were dead; knowing your husband and his love for you, I am certain that he is distraught." Does the speaker know that Euthymenes *is* in distress or that he *must be* in distress?

Walsh's 1991 translation introduces a third possibility:³

"Timonoe." Who are you? By God, I wouldn't have known you,
if your father's name, Timotheus, weren't there
On the gravestone, and Methymna, your city. I say it aloud:
a widower suffers, your husband Euthymenes.

"I say" is a more accurate translation of $\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}$ than "I know": albeit here a less natural one. But Walsh's rendering is designed to bring out his overall reading of epitaph as a device which lures its reader into a ritual performance. "For a reader who walks among gravestones, simply pausing and uttering the name of the dead constitutes a sufficient gesture of acknowledgement" (79). An epitaph's job is to persuade, intrigue, or if necessary trick the passer-by into reading the information it contains, preferably out loud. In *Anth. Pal.* 7.522, a poem which eschews *being* an epitaph in favour of dramatising the moment-by-moment process of *reading* an epitaph, $\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}$ is the pay-off: moved by his discovery, the speaker literally speaks the grief of Euthymenes, the force which put the stone here in the first place.

Gutzwiller translates the epigram differently again:⁴

"Timonoe." Who are you? By god, I wouldn't have known you
if your father's name, Timotheus, and your city, Methymna,
Hadn't been on your tomb. I say, your husband, Euthymenes,
bereft of you, must be in great grief.

It is obvious that $\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}$ presented Gutzwiller with a problem. She did not want to be as loose as Paton and translate "I know," something $\phi\eta\mu\acute{\iota}$ does not properly mean; but without Walsh's specific emphasis on the ritual act of speaking, the literal translation "I say that your widowed husband Euthymenes grieves

³ G. B. Walsh, "Callimachean Passages: The Rhetoric of Epitaph in Epigram," *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 77–103, at 95.

⁴ K. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1998) 201.

greatly” sounds unnatural. In English we only “say” things if we are asserting a personal opinion, and it often lends the assertion a deliberately confrontational or tendentious tone: “I say we ought to just lock him up.” So, in a nimble side-step, she opted for the slightly archaic English exclamation “I say!”—capturing the literal meaning of the word if not its contextual force. Her translation also removes the ambiguity discussed above by turning μέγα φημί ... ἀνιάσθαι into “*must* be in great grief.”⁵ This makes clear that the speaker had not known that Timonoe was dead until just now, and that he is extrapolating Euthymenes’ feelings from his acquaintance with the couple, not stating them from first-hand experience.⁶

For Paton the speaker is certain of Euthymenes’ grief; for Gutzwiller he is assuming it; for Walsh he is simply expressing it. But all three translations start from the fundamental assumption that Timonoe and Euthymenes are already known to him. Before questioning this assumption, I would like to examine the poem’s context.

Anth.Pal. 7.522 is part of a sequence of nine consecutive funerary epigrams attributed to Callimachus. I summarise them here for easy reference:

- 7.517 (32 G.-P. / 20 Pf.): Melanippus, a young man from Cyrene, and his sister Basilo, who died from grief at his death.
- 7.518 (36 G.-P. / 22 Pf.): Astacides, a Cretan goatherd snatched away by a nymph.
- 7.519 (44 G.-P. / 14 Pf.): Charmis, a young man who died unexpectedly, survived by his father Diophon.
- 7.520 (33 G.-P. / 10 Pf.): Timarchus, probably a philosopher, who can be found in Hades among the blessed.
- 7.521 (43 G.-P. / 12 Pf.): Critias, son of Hippacus and Didyme, who died away from his home in Cyzicus.

⁵ Gutzwiller, like Paton, takes μέγα as an adverb modifying ἀνιάσθαι, “greatly grieving.” Walsh apparently takes it as modifying φημί, “I say aloud”; but μέγα φημί would be more likely to mean “I say *loudly*,” since the idea of “aloud” is already implicit in φημί as a speech-verb. Neither Walsh nor Gutzwiller strongly brings out the sense of affirmative ἦ (Paton “of a truth”), though it may be tied up in Gutzwiller’s “must be.”

⁶ Cf. Gutzwiller 208, “the passerby who knows the man and so can give personal testimony to the grief he *must* feel.”

- 7.522 (40 G.-P. / 15 Pf.): Timonoe, daughter of Timotheus and wife of Euthymenes.
 7.523 (39 G.-P. / 60 Pf.): Cimon, son of Hippaeus.
 7.524 (31 G.-P. / 13 Pf.): Charidas, who speaks from Hades to tell the passer-by that there is only darkness after death.
 7.525 (29 G.-P. / 21 Pf.): the unnamed “son and father” of Callimachus, i.e. Battus.

A single-author section of this length is fairly unusual in *Anth.Pal.*; normally no more than four or five poems in a row are attributed to the same author. This one immediately follows a sequence of eleven poems assigned to Simonides, and Gutzwiller has argued persuasively that both sequences were taken from an appendix or supplement to Meleager’s *epitumbia*. Certainly it does not seem likely that the Callimachus-sequence was transferred directly from Meleager’s *Garland*, which never allows single-author sequences to run for this long; nor is it likely to have originated in either of *Anth.Pal.*’s two other major source-books: Agathias’ *Kyklos* includes only post-Hellenistic poets, and Philip’s *Garland* uses alphabetical ordering.⁷

Gutzwiller further suggests that these nine epitaphs represent, “probably with omissions,” an original sequence from Callimachus’ own book of epigrams.⁸ She is therefore able to draw some conclusions about the form and themes of Callimachus’ *epitumbia*: first, that they were at least partially organised by speaking voice (because of, e.g., the sequence of first-person plural verbs in 7.517–519); second, that they shared a darkly humorous concern with the impossibility of an afterlife, except in the sense that Callimachus claims immortality for himself, viz. that of literary

⁷ As Gutzwiller points out (*Poetic Garlands* 38), 7.518–522 do in fact follow alphabetical order: Ἀστακίδην, δαίμονα, ἦν, Κύζικον, Τιμονόη, before being broken by 523 οὔτινες. This is probably coincidence, but even if those five poems did originally appear in Philip, we lack a source for the remaining four.

⁸ *Poetic Garlands* 40. She summarises at 183–185 the main reasons for supposing that such a book existed; see also Gow and Page, *HE* II 153, and P. Bing, “Ergänzungspiel in the Epigrams of Callimachus,” *A&A* 41 (1995) 115–131, at 121 n.19.

survival.⁹ She argues that by the penultimate poem, Charidas in Hades, the poet has dynamited whatever fond illusion we might have held about the ability of the dead to communicate with us from beyond the grave (an illusion which many conventional epitaphs rely on for their effect): “Callimachus’ sepulchral section thus ends by revealing the fictionality of all its voices” (211).

In one respect her analysis goes too far. Charidas’ gloomy report from Hades does not prove “the falsity of all consciousness after death and so the falsity of all communication with those perished” (211). He tells the speaker that the underworld is a great darkness, *πολλὸς σκότος*; that there are no ways out of it; and that its ruler, Pluto, is only a story. In other words, he is contradicting what we might call a ‘mythological’ or ‘epic’ conception of Hades as a kind of kingdom, with its own monarch and its own infrastructure, which can be escaped by certain brave or lucky adventurers. He does not say that Hades does not exist, or that souls do not linger after death, and in fact his own ability to tell us what he knows can be taken as proof that an afterlife does indeed await us—but that we will wander in perpetual darkness, rather than feasting at banquets of the Blessed. The epitaph is surprising in context not because it disproves the whole notion of epitaph, but because it disproves a common and reassuring belief which other epitaphs frequently exploit.

One striking feature of 7.517–525 is its emphasis on death in its most arbitrary and depressing forms. Epitaph is not a cheerful genre, but plenty of Greek examples focus on positive aspects: they stress the achievements and virtues of the departed (e.g. 7.438 on the bravery of Machatas or 7.573 on Cheiridius the orator), or their continued existence in the afterlife (e.g. 7.483 on baby Callaeschron, now playing with Persephone in Hades; epitaphs which represent the dead person as speaking to the reader

⁹ This argument draws on E. Livrea, “Tre epigrammi funerari Callimachei,” *Hermes* 118 (1990) 314–324, who suggests that Timarchus in 7.520 was a Cynic philosopher who had actively tried to dispel traditional belief in the afterlife, and on Gutzwiller’s suggestion (206) that Cleombrotus in 7.471 has been led astray by excessive faith in Plato (cf. Gow and Page, *HE* II 204).

tend by their nature to provide this sort of comfort). At other times they take a barely-concealed delight in apt or unusual deaths, as in the various poems describing dipsomaniacs who drown in wine, fishermen who are eaten by fish, and so on. Callimachus was clearly capable of producing such pieces too. 7.454 (62 G.-P. / 36 Pf.) is essentially a joke on a drinker who drank too much;¹⁰ 7.458 (49 G.-P. / 50 Pf.) stresses Aeschra's virtue and the rewards it received; and 7.460 (47 G.-P. / 26 Pf.) relies on the assumption that because Micylus was a good man he will indeed receive kind treatment from the chthonic powers.

The nine-epigram sequence, on the other hand, is neither reassuring nor happily macabre. In fact it is noticeably bleak in its outlook. Melanippus (517) and Charmis (519) both die young, and the grief caused by the former's death is enough to kill his sister too. In 521 the point is that Hippacus and Didyme do not yet know their son is dead. 518 depicts Astacides' death as sudden and mysterious: he is simply snatched away in his prime, presumably leaving not even a corpse behind. The overriding sense is of death as a force which strikes from out of the blue, often targets the young and undeserving, and leaves the survivors bereft. 520 seems more hopeful—Timarchus can be sought out in Hades, where he dwells among the pious, a reassuringly traditional image—but, as other scholars have discussed, the poem is really a cruel paradox, since by the time you are able to find Timarchus and ask him about the afterlife you will be dead, and will be able to see it for yourself.¹¹

This brings us back to 522 and Timonoe. What exactly does Callimachus mean by ἦ μέγα φημὶ ... ἀνῴσθαι? None of the translations quoted so far really solve the problem. Paton's sounds right but stretches the Greek: if Callimachus had wanted

¹⁰ Sometimes discounted as Callimachean, e.g. by R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus II* (Oxford 1953) 90, but defended by E. Livrea, "Due epigrammi Callimachei," *Prometheus* 15 (1985) 199–206.

¹¹ Cf. Walsh, *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 90–91: "if we must die to find Timarkhos among others who know precisely what he knows, our mission has doubly lost its point ... [Callimachus'] drama is a dark comedy and its motives are absurd." See also Livrea, *Hermes* 118 (1990) 314–324.

to say “I know (= understand, am aware) that your husband is sad,” he would probably not have used *φημί*. Walsh’s depends heavily on the idea that speaking part of an epitaph constitutes a significant or ritual act, and also on *μέγα* meaning something it is unlikely to mean here. Gutzwiller’s relies on an idiom which exists in English but not in Greek.

The basic meaning of *φημί* is to say or to speak. This meaning is commonly extended in two ways. First of all, to affirm or acknowledge a thing by “saying it out loud,” as in Classical Greek where *φημί* is sometimes used as the opposite of “deny”: Eur. *El.* 1057 “Yes, I admit it (*φημί*) and do not deny it (*ἀπαρνοῦμαι*), child”; Pl. *Th.* 165A “the words which we are generally accustomed to use when agreeing (*φάναι*) or disagreeing (*ἀπαρνεῖσθαι*).” Second, to express a belief or opinion, and therefore simply to believe: *Il.* 5.103 “the best of the Achaeans is wounded, and I say/think (*φημί*) that he will not long hold up under the powerful arrow”; 6.488 “no man’s destiny, I say/think (*φημί*), can be escaped”; Hdt. 2.49.2 “I therefore say/think (*φημί*) that Melampus, as a wise man, acquired the art of prophecy”; etc.

The first of these meanings, applied here, would produce the sense “I acknowledge that your husband is grieving.” This is possible. The gravestone imagined by Callimachus might well have specified the detail of the husband’s grief: we know from *Anth.Pal.* 7 that sepulchral epigrams for women often expressed the sorrow of surviving loved ones. 7.184, 185, and 291 all furnish examples, as in particular does 340, a husband mourning his wife:

Νικόπολιν Μαράθωνις ἐθήκατο τῆδ’ ἐνὶ πέτρῃ,
 ὀμβρήσας δακρύοις λάρνακα μαρμαρέην.
 ἄλλ’ οὐδὲν πλέον ἔσχε· τί γὰρ πλέον ἀνέρι κήδευσ
 μούνῳ ὑπὲρ γαίης οἰχομένης ἀλόχου;

Marathonis laid Nicopolis in this stone tomb,
 wetting with tears the marble casket.

Yet he gained nothing by it; what is left for a man but sorrow,
 alone on the earth, his wife departed?

Scholars have tended to picture the epitaph behind the epitaph, the actual inscription carved on Timonoe’s tomb, as brief and prosaic (Gow and Page offer Τιμονόα Τιμοθέου Μηθυμ-

ναίου γυνὰ δὲ Εὐθυμένεος), but there is no reason we cannot see it as something more emotive and more in line with the epitaphs collected in *Anth. Pal.* 7. If it said, for example, “here lies Timonoe daughter of Timotheus, from Methymna: her grieving husband Euthymenes set this up,” the speaker could be responding in agreement—“yes indeed, I *affirm* that Euthymenes is very upset (having seen him recently).”

But the second meaning leads somewhere even more interesting, if we are prepared to make one small but fundamental change to our assumptions. How is the epigram altered if Callimachus is actually saying “I *think* that your husband is grieving”—expressing an opinion or belief, rather than admitting a known fact? This seems to bring us back towards the scenario implied in Gutzwiller’s translation “your husband *must be* in great grief”: a scenario in which the speaker has not seen Euthymenes for a while, had not known his wife was dead, and is now moved by a memory of how much the couple cared for each other. This makes for a genuinely touching and rather sweet poem—and one which seems somewhat out of place amid the nihilism of its surroundings.

To really bring out the cynical Callimachean wit at play here, we must turn our attention to line 1 and οὐ σ’ ὄν ἐπέγνων. The verb ἐπιγινώσκω appears twice in Homer, once meaning simply “look at, pay attention to” (*Od.* 18.30 of the Suitors watching Irus fight Odysseus) and once meaning “recognise” (*Od.* 24.217 of Odysseus testing whether Laertes will know who he is). The second meaning is the one which translators have adopted in 7.522: the speaker knows who Timonoe is, just as Laertes knows who Odysseus is, but would not have been able to *identify* her if not for the extra information on the grave. He would not have been able to match up the signifier TIMONOA to its correct referent, his acquaintance Timonoe of Methymna.

But it is important not to make assumptions here based on the English word “recognise.” Generally when English speakers use “recognise” of a person, we mean that we already know who they are, but are re-identifying them in a new context (as Laertes in fact fails to do with Odysseus): “I almost didn’t recognise you because of the hat!” But ἐπιγινώσκω is not restricted to re-

identifying things one already knows. In Thucydides’ famous dissection of Athenian error at 2.65, he says that the Sicilian expedition failed not because the Athenians misjudged their opponents, but because they misjudged the expedition itself: οἱ ἐκπέμψαντες οὐ τὰ πρόσφορα τοῖς οἰχομένοις ἐπιγιγνώσκοντες, “those who dispatched [the mission] not *understanding* what was useful for those who were setting out.” Here ἐπιγιγνώσκω means to *come to an awareness* of something.¹²

With this in mind, we can posit a fourth and final translation of 7.522 which changes very little but produces a very different effect:

“TIMONOE.” Who are you? By the gods, I’d not have known you, if the name of your father, “Timotheus,” hadn’t been here on the gravestone, and your city, “Methymna.” Yes, I suppose that your widowed husband Euthymenes is “filled with grief.”

The speaker has encountered a gravestone with a short epitaph. It begins “TIMONOE.” This tells him very little, any more than it would tell us to read on a gravestone that the deceased was called Sarah. So, in an attempt to glean some useful information—τίς δ’ ἐσσί;—he reads on. He quickly arrives at two more facts which are standard inclusions of epitaph: her father’s name and the name of her city. We now know that she is Sarah Smith, from Manchester. At this point, if the speaker does actually know a Timonoe daughter of Timotheus, of Methymna, he will have all the information he needs to “recognise” her and can be moved by appropriate emotions of shock, sadness, and so forth. But what if he does not? None of this information brings him any closer to *knowledge* of the dead woman. If he has no mental picture of Timonoe-from-Methymna already, this will certainly not give him one. Unlike some of Callimachus’ other epitaphs, like 7.459 on talkative Crethis, we are not told anything that might bring us as strangers closer to the person under the stone. All the speaker can do is read down to the final line—“her

¹² Of course, “recognise” in English, particularly in more formal English, can have this sense too: “I now recognise that I ought to have handled the situation differently.”

widowed husband Euthymenes, filled with grief, set this up”—and helplessly parrot its sentiment: Yes; I suppose he must be very sad. After all, it says so right here.¹³

Callimachus loves to play with the spaces that epigram leaves behind. The notorious bronze cockerel of Euaenetus (*Anth.Pal.* 6.149 / G.-P. 25 / Pf. 56) cannot personally vouch for the fact it has been set up to advertise, and is forced to rely on faith in its master. An object that we might take as impersonal and material proof of a thing having happened, in this case an athletic victory, reminds us that it is only saying what it has been told to say, before throwing in a hasty reassurance that its source is definitely trustworthy.¹⁴ In 7.522, we have an epitaph that points out the uselessness of epitaph. We see through the eyes of a passer-by who, like most passers-by, has no previous knowledge of the departed and will not be staggered by the coincidence of discovering her tomb. All he knows is what the words on the stone tell him, and they do not tell him very much.

Understanding the poem this way confers three advantages aside from simply making sense of the expression φημὶ ... ἀνιᾶσθαι. First of all, it continues Callimachus' sequence of thought from earlier in his *epitumbia*. 7.520 on Timarchus, the “dark comedy” of an epitaph which argues that the only way to learn about the afterlife is to die yourself, is matched by another bleakly funny poem, this one exposing conventional epitaph as

¹³ Walsh acknowledges the possibility that the tomb itself stated the husband's grief: “Widowed husbands grieve; therefore, if Timonoe is dead, Euthymenes grieves. This conclusion makes so much sense that we can't tell whether the poet-reader *merely reports what the epitaph told him*, or whether he infers Euthymenes' feelings from his own”: *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 96, italics mine.

¹⁴ A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton 1995) 93, argues that this poem is *so* confusing to a general reader that it must have been meant for a specific symposiastic audience; but he makes the poem harder than it needs to be. “The son of Phaedrus son of Philoxenus” in the final line is not the introduction of a second character, but rather an appropriately dedicatory periphrasis for Euaenetus himself. As in 7.522, Callimachus has fun with providing all the information an inscription ought to provide while avoiding the standard ways of doing so.

essentially meaningless to the vast majority of its readers.¹⁵ Second, and more important, it helps to make sense of the *following* poem. 7.523, the two-line epitaph for Cimon, has baffled many scholars with its extraordinary simplicity and—dare one say it—banality:

οἵτινες Ἀλείοιο παρέρπετε σᾶμα Κίμωνος
ἴστε τὸν Ἰππαίου παῖδα παρερχόμενοι.

All you who pass by the tomb of Cimon of Elis,
know that you are passing the son of Hippaeus.

Gutzwiller states the problem honestly: “the couplet preserved as 7.523 is commonplace, and so rather inconsequential for the literary reader ... We may wonder why Callimachus published it” (*Poetic Garlands* 39). Her explanation is that it could serve to introduce the motif of a tomb which addresses the passer-by, setting up the more complex development of that motif in 7.524, the Charidas dialogue. But 7.521 has already used the same motif, and besides, it seems strange that Callimachus should deliberately have included a boring poem just to provide contrast with a subsequent more interesting poem.

“Inconsequential” here is exactly the right word. Unless we already knew Cimon of Elis or his father Hippaeus, 7.523 means nothing to us at all. Where many epigrams provide a couple of significant details and invite us to fill in the blanks, to play what Bing calls *Ergänzungspiel*, here we have all blanks and no details. Did Cimon die young, and was he buried by his father? In which

¹⁵ We may suspect that some equally cynical streak runs through 7.521, the intervening poem on Critias. “Stranger, if you go to [place], tell them that x is dead” is a well-established *topos* of epitaph dating back at least as far as the famous poem on the dead of Thermopylae: “tell the Lacedaemonians that we lie here.” Callimachus’ version looks conventional enough, but in its context it almost comes to seem ridiculous. “Stranger, if you go to Cyzicus, find the well-known local couple Hippacus and Didyme and tell them that their son is dead.” Whoever composed these lines and erected the monument is not a Good Samaritan who stumbled upon an anonymous corpse, as in e.g. 7.277: he knew not only the dead man’s name and city but the names of his parents and their standing in the community—so why has he entrusted this urgent and essential news to an opportunistic gravestone that may well never manage to achieve its mission? Why not send a letter?

case, are we to read this poem as Hippaeus' defiant pride in his dead son? Or did Cimon reach a happy old age, and we are reading his own pride in his parentage? We may usefully compare 7.453, another two-line Callimachean epitaph, which achieves a devastating emotional impact simply by including the details that Nicoteles was twelve years old and the "great hope" of the father who buried him. Callimachus was more than capable of fitting a whole story into a single couplet. Here he deliberately refrains from doing so, frustrating his readers with the sheer emptiness of what they have been told. The firm command to "know", ἴστε, picks up on the problem with the previous poem—Callimachus only "knew" Timonoe by what her tombstone chose to tell him—and leaves us acutely aware that we "know" Cimon no better than when we started. We have his city and his father's name, and nothing more.

There is one final advantage to reading 7.522 as a story not about a passer-by who accidentally discovers a friend's last resting-place, but about a passer-by who reads a random gravestone and comes away none the wiser. The final poem of the nine-epigram Callimachus sequence, 7.525, is an epitaph for Callimachus' own father. It has received much scholarly attention, partly for the problem of its final lines—which if genuine would constitute a very deliberate allusion to the prologue of the *Aetia*, but which have often been taken as interpolated¹⁶—and partly for its almost riddling structure: we are nowhere given the name of the dead man himself, and are expected to identify him purely from the names of his father and his son.

The point, of course, is that because Callimachus is so famous, we can do exactly that. We know that Callimachus is the "son of Battus," so when we read an epitaph for the "father of Callimachus," we can fill in the missing name without needing to be told. But this twist ending to the sequence arrives with much greater force once we understand the preceding poems fully. 7.522 shows us an unsatisfying encounter with epitaph: a stranger who reads everything a tomb can tell him but is left at a loss how to respond, other than by echoing the commonplace sentiment it

¹⁶ E.g. by Pfeiffer, *Callimachus* II 86, and Gow and Page, *HE* II 187.

expresses. 7.523 gives us just such an encounter for ourselves: we are allowed to read an epitaph that is all but meaningless, and realise that, yes, we honestly found that a bit underwhelming, and that we really wish we had been told something more substantive about Cimon of Elis. 7.524 puts the lie to any cosy misconceptions we might have had about the afterlife as a “better place,” or about the desirability of ending up there: it is a gloomy void with no reward for good behaviour and no way back out to the light. And then, just as all hope seems lost, we reach 7.525.

We are assured, ἴσθι, that [Battus] is both the son and the father of Callimachus, just as we were assured, ἴστε, in 523 that Cimon was the son of Hippaeus; and then, we are told, εἰδείξ δ’ ἄμω κεν, “you will know them both.” You will know them in exactly the way you did not know Hippaeus, and the way the speaker of 522 still did not know Timonoe by the end of the epitaph. Callimachus Senior’s distinguished war record and Callimachus Junior’s immortal verses have ensured that now and for all time their names will carry meaning. “This is the tomb of Callimachus’ father” is a statement of widespread interest that even a casual passer-by like the speaker of 522 can be expected to understand. Walsh notes that the riddle of the grave’s occupant “is solved by the younger Callimachus’ fame,”¹⁷ but a much larger riddle is solved in the process: the riddle of epitaph. At the unexpectedly triumphant close of his otherwise nihilistic *epitumbia*,¹⁸ Callimachus sets out his final thesis: most human life, and death, is entirely unremarkable, and there is nothing better waiting for us on the other side. Only great deeds can ensure immortality—and all immortality really means is that when a stranger happens on your gravestone, you will be recognised. Even when somebody has never met you, they will have no need to ask τίς δ’ ἐσσί: they will already know who you are.

March, 2019

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¹⁷ Walsh, *Arethusa* 24 (1991) 94.

¹⁸ And probably also of his *Epigrammata*: M. Gabathuler, *Hellenistische Epigramme auf Dichter* (St Gallen 1937) 56; Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands* 211–213.