

Alexandrian before Alexandria: Court Poetry in Pre-Hellenistic Lycia (*CEG* 177)

Lycian elite taste for Greek cultural products is well-attested and has attracted significant scholarly attention (e.g. Draycott [2007], [2015]; Keen [1998], 66-9). I examine here the earliest extant Greek verse inscription from a public monument from Lycia, *CEG* 177, a twelve-line epigram inscribed on the dynast Gergis' monumental pillar-tomb in Xanthos (the 'Inscribed Pillar'). The thrust of my argument is that *CEG* 177 displays the same intricate literary tastes and allusivity characteristic of Hellenistic court poetry, and that the similarities are owed to shared social functions of literature in the court societies of dynastic Lycia and the Hellenistic empires, and to the similarities between contexts of literary production and reception. The paper focuses on three allusions in particular.

First, *CEG* 177 opens with a quotation of Simonides' epigram celebrating a Delian League victory over Persia, likely at Cyprus (45 Page): [ἐ]ξ οὗ τ' Εὐρώπην [Ἀ]σίας δίχα πόν[τ]ος ἔνεμ[ε]ν ('from the time when the sea rent Europe from Asia asunder'); echoes of that poem mark it as a conscious model for 177 (Ceccarelli [1996]). This appropriation of Simonides' verses is aptly polemical given historical circumstances: in 429 Gergis himself repelled an invading Athenian force trying to extract tribute for the Delian League, from which Lycia had evidently rebelled (Thuc. 2.69). Simonides' epigram was beloved by the Athenians, echoed in two of her public monuments' epigrams (*CEG* 6.ii, 890.i). Transplanted to Xanthos and carved on Gergis' tomb, Simonides' image of the continental rift of Europe and Asia no longer prefigures the Delian League's defeat of Persia, but is re-contextualized to celebrate Lycia's successful resistance to the Athenian empire.

The second allusion, the one to Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, is similarly well-tailored to the Lycian audience. The description of Gergis' wrestling talent ἀριστεύσας τὰ ἅπαντα / [χε]ρσί ('having excelled on all occasions with his hands,' 5-6) alludes to the herald Lichas' description of Heracles in *Trachiniae* (πάντ' ἀριστεύων χεροῖν, 'altogether excelling with his hands, 488). In Lycia, Heracles was the *interpretatio graeca* of the Anatolian rider-god Kakasbos and figured in other dynastic iconography and possibly literature. I suggest that 177's choice of the *Trachiniae*'s Heracles as a model for Gergis is motivated by the tragedy's emphasis on his success not only in wrestling, but also archery and city-sacking, all *aretai* cherished by the Lycian elite.

In a more complex allusion, *CEG* 177's description of the gods' thanks to Gergis (χάριν...οἱ ἀπεμνήσαντο, 'they rendered him thanks in return,' 9) looks back to *Theogony* 503, where Zeus' uncles, the Cyclopes, thank him (οἱ ἀπεμνήσαντο χάριν, 'they rendered him thanks in return) for freeing them from Cronus' bonds and present him with thunder and lightning. Zeus was the *interpretatio graeca* of the Lycian storm god Trqqas, to whom Gergis showed great piety (*CEG* 177.11; *TAM* i 44b.51-2). By alluding to this passage of the *Theogony* in particular, 177 compares Gergis to Zeus at the moment he assumes the attributes that define Lycian Trqqas. Furthermore, the Cyclopes' thanks come just after Zeus places the *omphalos* in Delphi, described as a θαῦμα ('wonder') and a σῆμα ('sign,' *Th.* 500). I suggest that the author of *CEG* 177 may have intended a comparison with Gergis' own tomb on which the epigram is inscribed, thus casting the Inscribed Pillar at Xanthos as a new *omphalos* at the center of the world.

These three allusions' sophisticated mechanics and their attempts to re-balance the scales of power and centrality in the *oikoumene* are best paralleled by Hellenistic court poetry. I

contend that these similarities are owed to shared social functions for literature in these court societies, namely fostering intra-elite competition and propagating a group identity predicated on the court as a new, yet ancient, cultural center in the *oikoumene* (Strootman [2017]). Lycian court poetry can serve as further evidence that Alexandrian learnedness was not owed exclusively to the Museum, but also to the social world of court.

Bibliography

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