

Studying Greek History through Inscriptions

THE EPIGRAPHY OF DEATH

Inscriptions relating to death

Decrees and laws on subjects concerning death and after death ceremonies

Funerary inscriptions on graves (prosa or verse)

Selective bibliography

- **Garland, R. (2001). *The Greek Way of Death*. 2nd edition. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.**
- Meyer, E. A. (1993). "Epitaphs and citizenship in classical Athens", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 103: 99-121.
- Nielsen, T. H. - L. Bertrup et al. (1989). "Athenian grave monuments and social class." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 30: 411-420.
- **Oliver, G. J. (2000). *The epigraphy of death. Studies in the history and society of Greece and Rome*. Liverpool**
- Osborne, R. (1996). Funerary monuments, the democratic citizen, and the representation of women, in M. B. Sakellariou (ed.), *Démocratie athénienne et culture*. Athens: 229-242.

Selective bibliography for funeral inscriptions

1. Bruss, J. St., *Hidden Presences. Monuments, Gravesites, and Corpses in Greek Funerary Epigram* (2005)
2. **Clairmont, C. (1983). *Patrios Nomos. public burials in Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. The archaeological, epigraphic-literary and historical evidence. Oxford, BAR International series 161.***
3. Lattimore, R., *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (1942)
4. *Rest Lightly: An Anthology of Latin and Greek Tomb Inscriptions*, επιμ. P. Shore (1997)
5. Tsagalis, Chr., *Inscribing sorrow : fourth-century Attic funerary epigrams* (2008)
6. **Vérilhac, A.-M., *Παίδες άωροι. Poésie funéraire, 2 τόμ. (1978)***

Funerary legislation

Frisone, F. (2000). *Leggi e Regolamenti Funerari nel Mondo Greco: I. Le Fonti Epigraphiche*. Lecce.

Garland, R. (1989). "The well-ordered corpse: an investigation into the motives behind Greek funerary legislation", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 36: 1-15.

Curses on the graves

Bryce, T. B. (1981). "Disciplinary agents in the sepulchral inscriptions of Lycia", *Anatolian Studies* 31: 81-94.

Strubbe, J. (1997). *ΑΠΑΙ ΕΠΙΤΥΜΒΙΟΙ Imprecations against desecrators of the grave in the Greek epitaphs of Asia Minor. A catalogue*. Bonn.

What is done during the burial.

- *Prothesis*: the laying out of the body
- *Ekphora*: the procession to the grave
- *Kedeia/Taphos*: the actual burial

After the burial: memorial ceremonies + ritual cleansing



Prothesis



Lamentatio (ritual dirge)



Ekphora (the procession to the grave)





White ground lekythos showing a woman beside a tombstone performing commemorated rituals for the dead



Where

At home

In the tomb which lies in a cemetery, in a funerary precinct, next the roads.

- *Tafikos peribolos*: a funerary precinct for the family
- *Parodios tafos*: a grave next to a road
- *Tymbos*: the grave
- *Sema*: the visible monument

Kerameikos, Athens

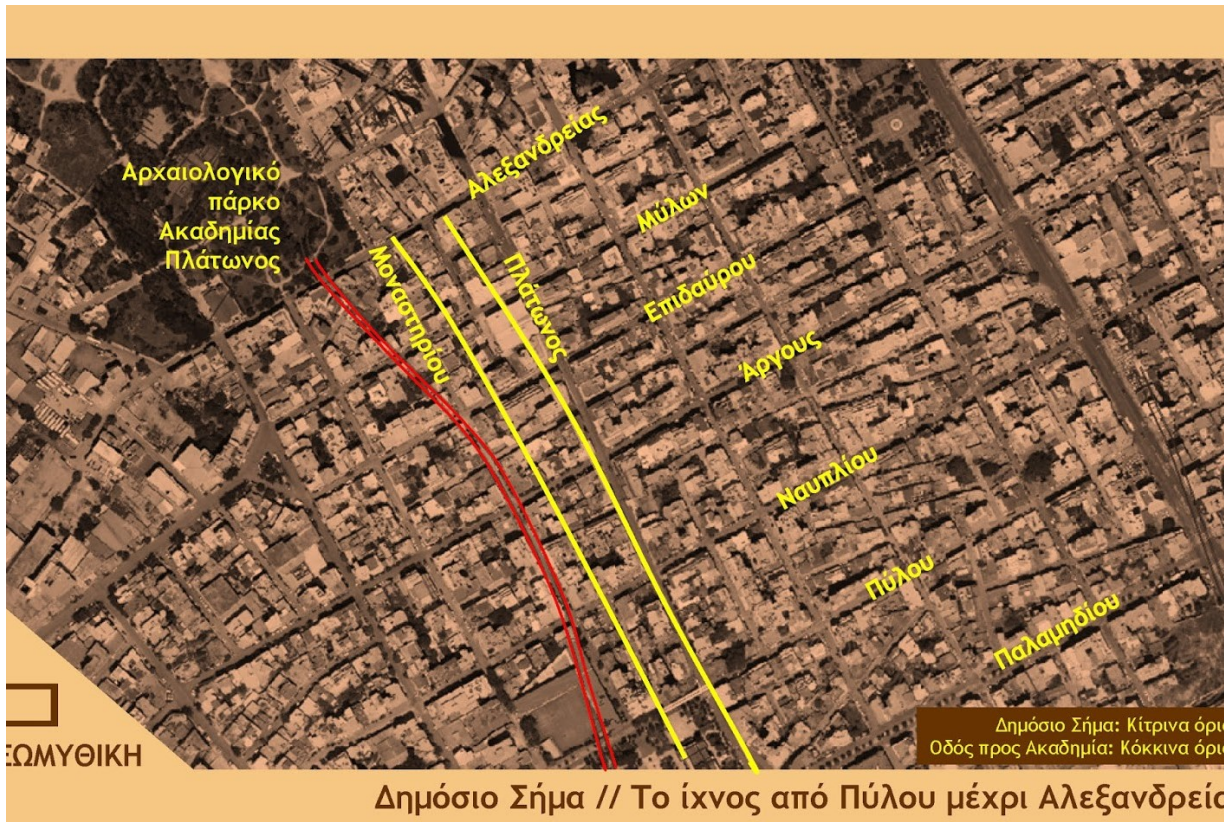


Kerameikos. Peribolos tombs on a road that eads to one of the major gates of the city



Demosion Sema

Demosion Sema is the cemetery of Athens which was founded during the classical period along the ancient road to the Plato's Academy. There were buried, at public expense, eminent men such as Kleisthenes, Perikles, Armodios, Aristogeiton, Thrasybulos, but also those who died in the numerous wars of the Athenians. According to the Law (*Patrios Nomos*), the dead of the wars, after being cremated, were transported from the distant battlefields for honorable burial. It is speculated that Pericles delivered his famous Epitaph speech to honour the first dead of the Peloponnesian War, in 431-430 BC, at *Demosion Sema*.



**LAWS ABOUT GRAVES, CEREMONIES,
PURIFICATION**

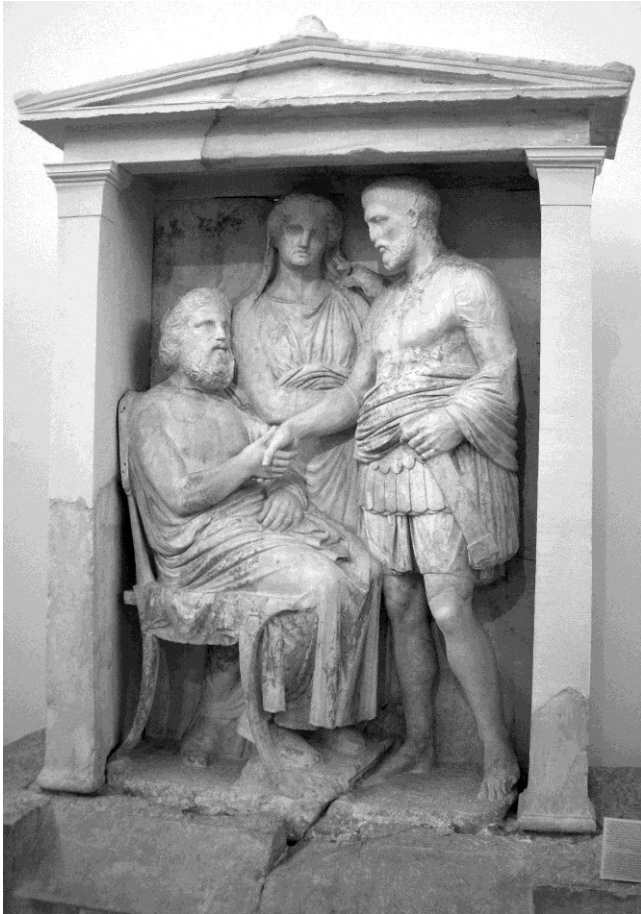
Plutarch, *Solon* 21. 6

He also subjected the public appearances of the women, their mourning and their festivals, to a law which did away with disorder and licence. ... Laceration of the flesh by mourners, and the use of set lamentations, and the bewailing of any one at the funeral ceremonies of another, he forbade. The sacrifice of an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor the burial with the dead of more than three changes of raiment, nor the visiting of other tombs than those of their own family, except at the time of interment.

Cicero, *De legibus* 2.26.64-66

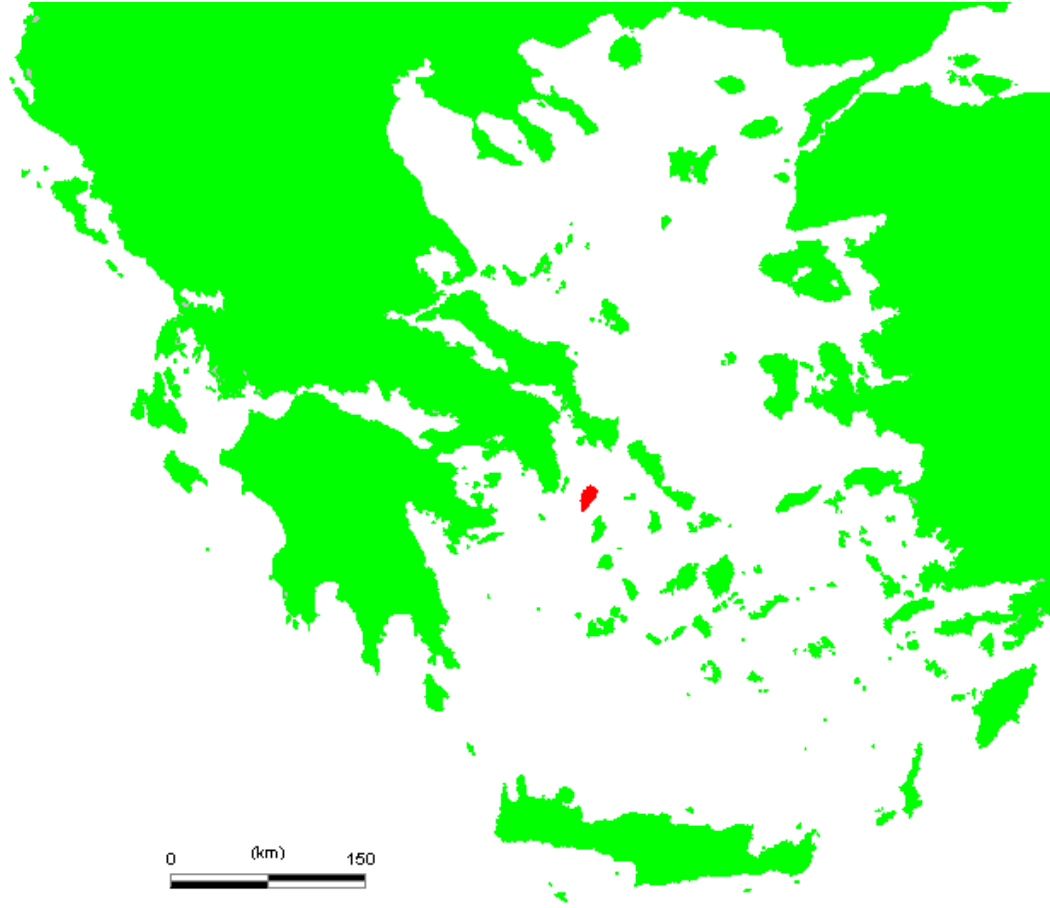
When later, as Demetrios from Phaleron writes, people had begun to conduct funeral services at great expense and to accompany them with dirges, **these abuses were abolished by the law of Solon...** For the instruction about the **three cloths**, like most everything else, comes from Solon. The provision about the **dirge** is even taken verbatim: "The women shall not scratch their cheeks and shall not intonate a dirge during the burial".

Simplicity vs. Luxury



Athenian funerary monuments after the legislation of Demetrios of Phaleron (end of the 4th c.BC)





Funerary laws from Iulis on Keos, 425-400 BC, *IG XII 5, 593 = CGRN 35*

Face A

These are the laws regarding the deceased. The deceased must be buried according to the following guidelines: in three white cloths, a cloth underneath the corpse, one wrapped about it, and one over it—there may be less than that— (5) worth not more than three hundred drachmae. One should carry him out on a bier with wedge-shaped legs and do not cover [...] with cloths. Carry wine to the tomb, but no more than three choes, and oil, not more than one chous, and (10) bring back the containers. Carry the deceased, completely covered over, to the tomb in silence. Use a preliminary offering according to (the ancestral customs). Bring back indoors the bier from the tomb and the bedclothes, and on the following day a freeman should (15) sprinkle the house with seawater first, and then all the living quarters with oregan afterwards. When it has been sprinkled, the house is clean, and one should offer the sacrifices at the hearth. The married women who go to the funeral rite should leave (20) the tomb before their husbands. ... Wherever someone dies, when he is carried out, no women should go to the house, (25) other than the polluted ones. Polluted are the mother and the wife and the sisters and the daughters. In addition to these there should not be more than five women. And children of the daughters and of first cousins. But nobody else. Those who are polluted, (30) having washed themselves [...] with a pouring of water are clean.

Funerary law from Gambreion, *GIG 3562 = CGRN 108*, 3rd c. BC

With good fortune. When Demetrios was *hieronomos*, on the 2nd of the month Thargelion, Alexon son of Damon proposed: there is to be a law for the people of Gambreion, (5) that the women who are in mourning are to wear grey clothes, not dirty ones; and that men and children in mourning are also to wear grey clothes, unless they prefer to wear white. (10) The customary rites are to be fulfilled within three months for those who have gone to their end (i.e. died). On the fourth month men are freed from mourning, women on the fifth. ... The *gynaikonomos* appointed by the people for the purifications (20) prior to the Thesmophoria is to pray that "it will go well for those men who abide by and for women who obey his law, and they will have the enjoyment of their present blessings, but for those who do not obey it or abide by it, the opposite (will happen). (25) And it will not be pleasing to the gods for women (who disobey the law) to sacrifice, since they are impious, to any god for ten years". Let the treasurer chosen for the next year after (the year of) the *stephanephoros* Demetrios inscribe this law on two (30) stelae and erect one these stelae in front of the doors of the Thesmophorion, the other in front of the temple of Artemis Lochia. The treasurer is to report the expenditure (35) for the stelae in the first meeting of the *logistai*.

Consolation decree for a deceased woman

I.Knidos 71, Knidos, 1st/2nd c. AD

Because X from the descendants of Theopompos, the son of Artemidoros, who brought about the freedom of our forefathers and freedom from taxation, died , and (because) the people were shocked beyond measure (by her death) because of her virtue and reputation, they gathered with great zeal in the theatre and, when her body was carried out, the people seized her body and then unanimously demanded that she be buried with the participation of all the people, manifesting by acclamations her virtue, so that after her death she might also receive the appropriate honours similar to those of her ancestors.

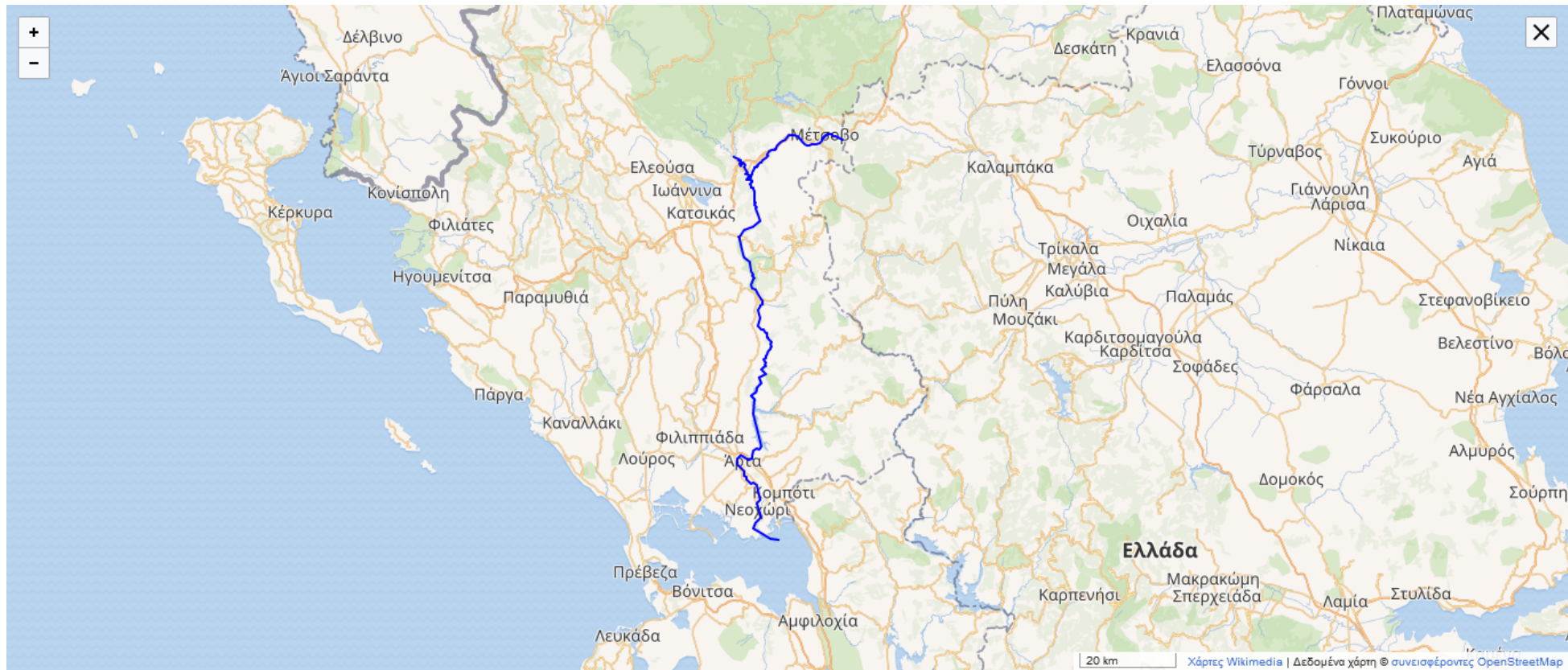
Funerary inscriptions

1. Name of the deceased
2. Profession
3. Age
4. Relatives
5. Conditions of the death, justification of the memorial
6. Greetings to passers-by
7. Consolation to the dead
8. Curses against the violators of the grave
9. Reminder of the care of the burial and post-mortem honours

**Tod M.N., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century BC*, Οξφόρδη, 1946, Vol. 1, no 2
Corfu, 630-600 BC**



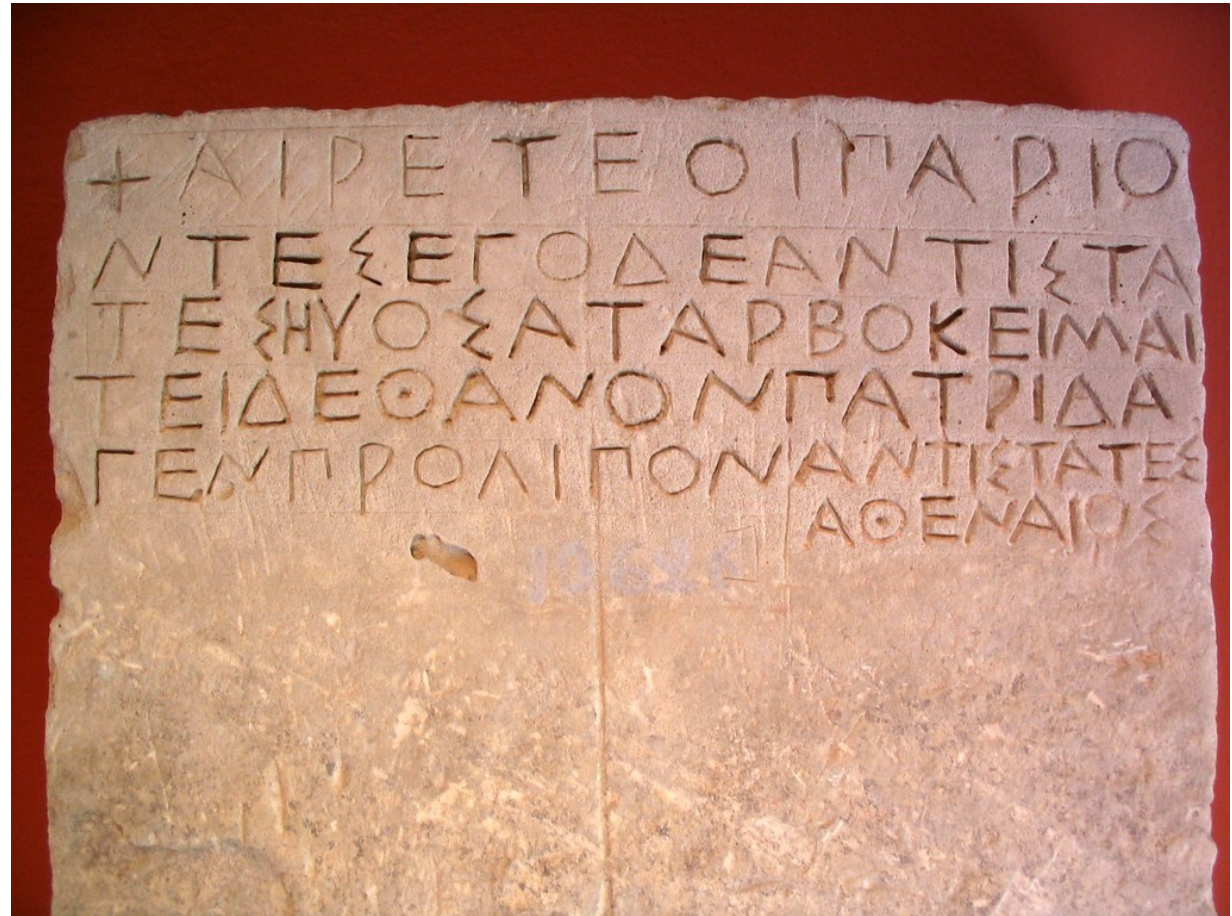
This is the sign of Arniadas who was destroyed by fiery-eyed Ares fighting close to the ships on [river] Arachtos's flows, greatly excelling in the uproar of the battle that brings lament.



Εμφάνιση κοντινών άρθρων

Εξωτερικοί χάρτες

IG I³ 1503 = IG
IV 50, Aegina,
ca. 457-431 BC



Greetings passers-by! But I, Antistates son of Atarbos, lie here dead, having previously left my fatherland. Antistates Athenian.

Tombstone, Demetrias/Thessaly, 3rd c. BC



Menelaos, son of
Hegesidemus, from
Amphipolis

Funerary epigram for a pig, Edessa, 2nd-3rd c. AD

A pig, friend to everybody
a four-footed youngster
here I lie, having left
behind the land of Dalmatia,
offered as a gift,
and Dyrrachion I trod
and Apollonia, yearning
and all the earth I crossed
on foot alone unscathed.
But by the force of a wheel
I have now lost the light,
longing to see Emathia
and the chariot of Phallos
Here now I lie, owing
nothing to death anymore



Curses and fines on the graves

- The practice of a curse laid on a tomb or gravesite was quite common in other civilizations of antiquity. The tomb or grave was the eternal home of the physical remains of the deceased, furnished with various objects the dead person would want or need in the next life. Many of these tombs, therefore (especially of the upper class and nobility) attracted the attention of robbers.
- People who could not afford to bury their dead one might use someone else's grave or someone who could not afford a tombstone might just steal one already used, scrape off the previous person's name, and use it for their own purposes.
- To prevent either of these violations of a grave, curses as well as fines to be imposed by authorities were often included in epitaphs.

Grave stele of Nikephoros and Glykonis, Conane/Bahkesir,

I.Mysia 525, end of 2nd -beginning of 3rd c. AD



Nikephoros, son of Moschion
(made) (this grave) for his wife
Glykonis and in his own memory
while still alive: if anyone buries
another body (here) without my
permission, he will pay 2500 denarii
to the city and will be responsible
for the crime of grave robbery.

FINANCING THE MEMORY

**Delphi. Dedication of money by Alkesippos to Apollo and the city of
Delphi for a festival in his memory
*CID V 128, Delphi, 183/2 BC***

When Damosthenes was archon, in the month of Poitropios, Alkesippos, son of Boutheras from Kalydon, dedicated to the god and to the city of Delphi 130 golden coins and 22 silver mines and 30 staters on the following terms: if Alkesippos suffers anything, the city of Delphi shall perform a sacrifice and public feast to Apollon Pythios every year, calling it Alkesippeia, from the interests produced by the gold and silver. The sacrifice shall be performed in the month of Heraios and the priests of Apollon and the archon and the prytaneis and all the other citizens shall march in procession from the circular square. Let the magistrates inscribe this in the sanctuary and the dedication be valid. And all his (i.e. Alkesippos') other personal belongings shall be dedicated, if anything happens to him, to the god and the city, as well as Theutima, his own slave, so that she become free, if anything happens to him. Let Damippos, Theutima, Ageas and Peisilaos bury him using the bronze money that he deposits in his house and let them render an account to the city. Witnesses: Kritolaos, Latropos, Ageas, Polemokrates, Agasidamos, Gennaios, Xenokrates of Medeon, Stratagos, Kallikles, Andronikos, Pisilaos, Dexikrates, Charixenos, Polemarchos, son of Pausanias, Athambos, Ageas, Peisilaos shall keep the testaments.