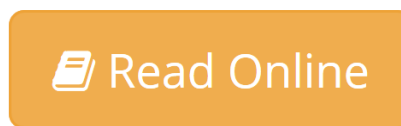


Cut These Words into My Stone: Ancient Greek Epitaphs

From Johns Hopkins University Press



Cut These Words into My Stone: Ancient Greek Epitaphs From Johns Hopkins University Press

Cut These Words into My Stone offers evidence that ancient Greek life was not only celebrated in great heroic epics, but was also commemorated in hundreds of artfully composed verse epitaphs. They have been preserved in anthologies and gleaned from weathered headstones.

Three-year-old Archianax, playing near a well,
Was drawn down by his own silent reflection.

His mother, afraid he had no breath left,
Hauled him back up wringing wet. He had a little.

He didn't taint the nymphs' deep home.
He dozed off in her lap. He's sleeping still.

These words, translated from the original Greek by poet and filmmaker Michael Wolfe, mark the passing of a child who died roughly 2,000 years ago. Ancient Greek epitaphs honor the lives, and often describe the deaths, of a rich cross section of Greek society, including people of all ages and classes? paupers, fishermen, tyrants, virgins, drunks, foot soldiers, generals?and some non-people?horses, dolphins, and insects. With brief commentary and notes, this bilingual collection of 127 short, witty, and often tender epigrams spans 1,000 years of the written word.

Cut These Words into My Stone provides an engaging introduction to this corner of classical literature that continues to speak eloquently in our time.

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Editorial Review

Review

In *Cut These Words into My Stone*, we observe a procession of people of every kind making their way to the underworld, each one's life summarized in a pithy, witty, and sometimes poignant verse epitaph. Miniature masterpieces, these verses are testimony to the richness and variety of ancient life and to the wry dignity with which the ancients commemorated their loved ones. They gleam anew in their unaffected and forceful translations by Michael Wolfe.

(Raymond P. Scheindlin, author of *The Book of Job: A Verse Translation*)

Michael Wolfe has done a beautiful job of tracing, in clear and straightforward translations, the development of old Greek grave-inscriptions into a major literary mode. His renderings of the epitaphs are simply stunning.

(Richard Wilbur, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Bollingen Prize-winning translator)

A fascinating trove that reveals the occupations, obsessions, passions, fears, drudgeries, shortcomings, and victories of ordinary Greeks—those who rarely appear in the spotlight that Athenian playwrights, philosophers, and historians shine on the legendary, the famous, and the notorious. The Greek poets hired to memorialize the deceased did so with artful tact and compassion, and often with astringent irony. Michael Wolfe's translations capture them all with equal art, populating our personal agora with voices once again pungent, and fully present.

(Robert Bagg, poet and translator)

Michael Wolfe's magnificent new book is the latest word on the Greek phenomenon of epitaphs. These chiseled gems range from the mournful to the humorous. Together they are a rhapsody on the theme of the memento mori, the reminder of death as a goad to the well-lived life.

(Phil Cousineau, author of *Who Stole the Arms of the Venus de Milo?*)

For something to read in normal circumstances? Today it's Michael Wolfe's wondrous set of translations of ancient Greek epitaphs, *Cut These Words into My Stone*. A book Keats would deeply appreciate. A book to keep handy by bed or bath.

(Bill Berkson *Harriet*)

Cut These Words into my Stone is not a long book, but its short pages have a great balance between education and emotionally touching poetry. The translator's note, introduction, and chapter introductions are all deeply researched, but still accessible to a lay reader.

(Elizabeth Franklin *Portland Book Review*)

This pleasing volume should introduce a new generation of general readers to the important poetic tradition of the ancient Greek grave epigram... No previous English study of quite this scope exist.

(*Choice*)

A wonderful short volume on Greek epitaphs which will appeal both to the general reader and the specialist... I highly recommend this book as a solid introduction to the reading and translating of Greek epigrams, and as a useful reference for illustrating how poetic translations of ancient Greek can be beautifully rendered for the modern audience while still remaining loyal to the ancient Greek use of language

(Philip J. Smith *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*)

As you turn the pages of this modest-seeming book you begin to succumb to magic. Each of these epitaphs is a poem that opens a window onto a life in Antiquity... If you wanted to find a single volume that gives a sense of the genius of the ancient Greeks, and reflects their influence on the cultural life of subsequent ages, you would be pushed to find anything better than this.

(Alex Martin *The Anglo-Hellenic Review*)

About the Author

Michael Wolfe is a poet, author, documentary film producer, and president of Unity Productions Foundation, a nonprofit media organization. Wolfe is the author of many books of verse and prose, including *The Hadj: An American's Pilgrimage to Mecca*. **Richard Martin** is Anthony and Isabelle Raubitschek Professor of Classics at Stanford University.

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