

# Notes on Pessoa, *Inscriptions*, and the *Greek Anthology*

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## Keywords

Fernando Pessoa, Epigram, English Poetry, *Greek Anthology*, *Inscriptions*.

## Abstract

The *Greek Anthology*, in the edition and translation of William Roger Paton, was the model for the genre, mood, title, and often the style of Fernando Pessoa's *Inscriptions* (1921). Pessoa left considerable marginalia in his copy of Paton's translation, which indicate the poems he was particularly drawn to, mainly the epitaphic poems of the seventh book of the Anthology. In imitating these poems, Pessoa was participating in a widespread Victorian and Edwardian practice, which a few Anglo-American modernists also continued.

## Palavras-chave

Fernando Pessoa, Epigrama, Poesia Inglesa, *Antologia Grega*, *Inscriptions*.

## Resumo

A *Greek Anthology* (*Antologia Grega*), editada e traduzida por William Roger Paton, serviu de modelo em gênero, tom, título e, frequentemente, estilo para a obra *Inscriptions* (1921) de Fernando Pessoa. Pessoa deixou uma considerável margem em sua cópia da tradução de Paton, indicando os poemas que mais lhe chamaram a atenção, principalmente os epítáfios do sétimo livro da Antologia. Ao imitar estes poemas, Pessoa tomava parte em uma difundida prática vitoriana e eduardiana, que alguns modernistas Anglo-Americanos também continuaram.

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The *Greek Anthology*, in the edition and translation of William Roger Paton,<sup>1</sup> left a direct imprint on Pessoa's published poetry in three instances, all within the decade of the 1920s: first, it was the model for the genre, mood, title, and often the style of *Inscriptions* (PESSOA, 1921), which consists of fourteen English epigrams and which is undersigned with the place and date "Lisbon, 1920"; second, unsigned translations of eight poems from the Anthology were published in *Athena* n.º 2 in 1924;<sup>2</sup> and thirdly, it is mentioned in the poem "P-Há" by Álvaro de Campos, dated "2-12-1929," (PESSOA, 2014: 21 and 73) where the speaker, feeling at a loss, decides to write his epitaph and refers ironically to the *Greek Anthology*.<sup>3</sup> As we would expect, the Anthology also influenced Pessoa's poetry indirectly, especially in the case of the heroic 'epitaphs' of *Mensagem* [Message] (1934) and in the Horatian voice of Ricardo Reis<sup>4</sup> (cf. PESSOA, 2016b).

The *Greek Anthology* is a very large collection, comprised of more than four thousand epigrams, mainly composed in elegiac couplets, and written over more than a millennium. It is divided into fifteen books, arranged by subject; an additional sixteenth book was added to it in the process of a complex textual history. Among the most famous books of the *Greek Anthology* are the fifth book (erotic poetry), the sixth book (votive or dedicatory poems), and the seventh book (epitaphs and poems on death). These three books contain the originals of the eight poems that Pessoa translated into Portuguese in 1924. The seventh book, epitaphs or sepulchral epigrams, is the model for *Inscriptions*. The books are not always as sharply divided by theme as their titles would suggest, however, and some of the epigrams from earlier books, as well as some of the admonitory epigrams from book 10 and the satirical epigrams from book 11, are also consistent with the mood of *Inscriptions*.

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<sup>1</sup> The five volumes that comprise this edition of the *Greek Anthology* are extant in Pessoa's Private Library (PATON, 1916-1918; Fernando Pessoa House, 8-235); cf. PIZARRO, FERRARI, and CARDIELLO (2010: 251).

<sup>2</sup> "Da Anthologia Grega," *Athena* n.º 2, November 1924, p. 50. The eight poems translated correspond to 5.34, 5.80, 5.81, 6.1, 7.16, 7.20, 7.441, and 7.469. Around the same time, Pessoa translated eleven additional epigrams: 5.11, 21, 51, 67, 77, 78; 6.7; 7.33, 84, 144, 348. Cf. SARAIVA (1996: 190-195).

<sup>3</sup> "Quero escrever o meu epitaphio: Alvaro de Campos jaz | Aqui, o resto a Anthologia Grega traz...." (PESSOA, 2014: 237) ["I want to write my epitaph: Alvaro de Campos lies | Here, the rest the Greek Anthology brings..."]. Imitating the Greek Anthology was a notorious pastime for writers who lacked inspiration. I believe that the lack of inspiration is the point of the irony in the context of this poem, rather than an oblique allusion to homosexuality (cf. CASTRO, 2013: 151).

<sup>4</sup> Horace's odes regularly draw on the Greek Anthology as models for mood and form. On the relation of some of the poems in *Mensagem* to the Anthology, see George MONTEIRO (2000: 8) quoting Jorge de Sena and discussing in particular "Epitáfio de Bartolomeu Dias" ["Epitaph of Bartolomeu Dias"].

In European literature, it is not generally possible to isolate the influence of the *Greek Anthology* from the influence of other ancient sources.<sup>5</sup> A given epigram may, for example, be present in the *Greek Anthology* in several versions; it may also have been quoted by other ancient Greek writers, or translated and adapted by a Latin one; and its themes and motifs may have been taken up by later lyric poets. Pessoa's epigrams do not always refer to a specific source in the *Anthology*, and sometimes echo Horace and perhaps Martial as much as they do Greek epigram: this has been the case with lyric poetry since the Renaissance.<sup>6</sup>

Western writers on poetics were often uncertain about the nature of the epigrams found in the *Anthology*; arguments focused on their length, meter, mood, genre, and relation to other genres. In particular, critics argued over the relevance of the historical origin of epigrams in inscriptions, that is, as writing attached to an external object, such as a tombstone. Pessoa, by entitling his English poems "Inscriptions," makes it clear that he is concerned with the epigram in this etymological sense, and above all as epitaphs.<sup>7</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Hellenistic poetry came into its own as a distinct object of critical attention, in particular with the essays by John North and Sainte-Beuve on Greek epigram. In England it had a particularly strong appeal, as Victorian literature shared with Hellenistic literature a feeling for having come after a major creative period. Both therefore sought to exploit the untapped potential of small forms; self-consciously foregrounded artificiality in sophisticated appeals to nature and to naive loves, often with a pensive or wistful tone; and elaborated sexual desire within strict conventions. Later in the century, the same-sex erotic epigrams, including some from the notorious Book 12 (on pederastic love), were explored and translated by writers including William Johnson Cory and John Addington Symonds, but until Wilde's trial this interest was easily overlooked in the concern of maintaining normal sexual hypocrisy. All educated gentlemen were comfortable and familiar with the *Anthology*. In particular, the late Victorian edition and translation by J. W. Mackail, *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology* (1890, with many subsequent editions), was popular and influential. Translating Greek epigrams, and for that matter composing them, was an almost universal pastime for a certain class of men in England until the Second World War.

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<sup>5</sup> I draw here and in the following paragraph on my "Modern Reception of Greek Epigram" (HAYNES, 2007: 565-583).

<sup>6</sup> See Pessoa's epigram on Martial in FERRARI and PITTELLA (2016: 216, n. 2).

<sup>7</sup> Pessoa's interest in epitaphs can be found as early as in the poetry of Charles Robert Anon, one of the first English fictitious authors he created while still in South Africa. For a description of Anon as well as some of his writings, see PESSOA (2016a: 139-156); an example of an epitaph attributed to this early English fictitious author can be found in PESSOA (2015: 17).

For instance, the *Athenaeum* published more than a dozen translations of epigrams from the Anthology in the year that Pessoa's book of English poems was noticed in it; George Monteiro has drawn attention to those translations, speculating that Pessoa may have intended his own *Inscriptions* for that magazine (MONTEIRO, 2000: 8).<sup>8</sup> One of the translators was R. A. Furness (1883-1954), whose subsequent career is very well-attested (he introduced Forster to Cavafy, his translations from the *Anthology* were subsequently published as books, and he won a knighthood). The other, P. H. C. Allen, was killed in France in 1915 at the age of twenty-four or twenty-five.<sup>9</sup> The stilted and archaizing English of their translations is instantly recognizable as typical Victorian "Wardour Street" translationese,<sup>10</sup> quite distinct from the oddly twisted diction and sometimes grammatically contorted language of Pessoa.

Modern poets in English took the *Greek Anthology* in two new directions. Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, and H. D. found in it a sympathetic source of imagistic expression, while Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), a collection of narrative epitaphs, offered perhaps the closest analogue in genre to Pessoa's *Inscriptions*. However, Masters locates the deaths in a contemporary American small town, while Pessoa preserves the referents to classical antiquity.

After Mackail, the most significant development in the English reception of the Greek Anthology was the appearance in 1916-1918 of a bilingual edition and translation of the whole work in five volumes by W. R. Paton (1857-1921).<sup>11</sup> Paton was a non-professional classicist whose inheritance allowed him to travel extensively in Greece recording inscriptions. He would marry into a Greek family and settle in Greece. Appalled by the English treatment of Wilde, he was actively involved in the campaign on Wilde's behalf. His scholarship was of a high order (he was supported by Wilamowitz), and his translations were sensitive to the

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<sup>8</sup> In January 1919 the *Athenaeum* included Pessoa's English chapbooks in a "List of New Books" (p. 36). And on 30 January 1920 it published Pessoa's poem "Spell" (from *The Mad Fiddler*, a collection of Pessoa's English poems that was rejected by a London-based publisher in 1917). This was the only English-language poem of Pessoa's to appear in England during his lifetime.

<sup>9</sup> *The Athenaeum*, 1 August, 1919, p. 680 gives his age at death as twenty-four; his grave at Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery in Fleurbaix indicates twenty-five.

<sup>10</sup> A typical instance is Allen's version of 5.170: "Nothing is more sweet than Love, all other joys are second; | Ev'n honey in my mouth is bitter reckoned. | This Nossis says, that whoso Aphrodite doth not bless, | What roses all her flowers are he cannot know nor guess" (*Athenaeum* [8 August, 1919], p. 713).

<sup>11</sup> On Paton, see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography; The Dictionary of British Classicists*; Gideon Nisbet, *Greek Epigram in Reception: J. A. Symonds, Oscar Wilde, and the Invention of Desire, 1805-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and J. Robert Maguire, *Ceremonies of Bravery: Oscar Wilde, Carlos Blacker, and the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Greek, slightly archaizing, and self-censored in relatively few cases (there are a few omissions, translations into Latin, and euphemisms, such as “fruition” for βίτην<sup>12</sup>).

Although Pessoa knew some Greek (see FERRARI, 2009),<sup>13</sup> for *Inscriptions* and his own translations he relied on the bilingual edition of the *Greek Anthology* by W. R. Paton in five volumes that had appeared in 1916-1918, shortly before his work on them. Pessoa himself noted, and defended, his dependence on the English translation:

Se eu citar, ainda que no original, uma phrase grega ou allemã, não vem a proposito dizerem-me, o que é aliás verdade, que não sei grego nem allemão [...]

Posso traduzir, atravez de idioma intermedio, qualquer poema grego, desde que consiga approximar-me do rhythmo do original, para o que basta saber simplesmente ler o grego, o que de facto sei, ou que obtenha uma equivalencia rhythmica.

D’essa maneira traduzi alguns poemas da *Anthologia Grega*.

(in PITTELLA and PIZARRO, 2016: 255-257)

[If I quote a Greek or German sentence, even in the original, do not accuse me of not knowing Greek or German, true though it may be (...)]

As long as I can feel the rhythm of the original or find a rhythmical equivalence, I can translate any Greek poem by way of an intermediary language. Reading Greek, something I can do, is all that is necessary. I have translated some poems of the Greek anthology in this way.]

In Pessoa’s copy of Paton’s bilingual *Greek Anthology*, he left marginalia to about 125 different poems, the majority coming from Book VII (the model for *Inscriptions*), with most of the others from books V, X, and XI. The pencil marks, the kind of marginal notations he made throughout, and the script in the eleven cases where it appears do not vary much in appearance, suggesting that his annotation may have taken place within a relatively concentrated period. Almost all the Greek epigrams he marked for attention, even the erotic ones, are on satirical and gloomy themes, such as the fickleness of love, the transience of beauty, the travail of prostitution, and death. Among them, epigrams by Palladas are particularly relevant to the mood of *Inscriptions*. For instance:

<sup>12</sup> 5.29: the Greek means “to fuck.” As Gideon Nisbet notes (p. 269), “fruition” is “at least lexically in the ballpark”; another version from Paton’s day translates it as “kiss.”

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however, that in his copy of Paton’s *Greek Anthology*, Pessoa twice made marginal notation to the Greek text rather than the English translation (cf. Annex II). Pessoa’s library includes a French schoolboy edition of the Greek text of *Prometheus Unbound* (then attributed to Aeschylus), which bears on the front flyleaf the name “Alexander Search” and the date “December, 1906.” It includes the scansion and marginal translation of a few lines; see FERRARI (2009: 39). The edition (*Prométhée enchainé*, ed. H. Weil, 1884) has the call number 8-177. There are a few Greek words in Pessoa’s archive, at times with Search’s signature accompanying them (e.g., BNP/E3, 79A-85<sup>r</sup>). For the most part, Pessoa’s study of the Greek language was limited to his university period (for a detailed account of his *Curso Superior de Letras* in Lisbon, see PRISTA, 2001).

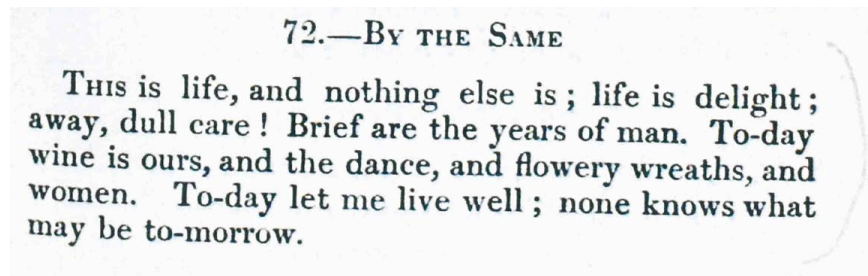


Fig. 1. *The Greek Anthology*, vol. I, p. 163, detail. Epigram by Palladas of Alexandria. Marked by Pessoa.

This is life, and nothing else is; life is delight; away, dull care! Brief are the years of man. To-day wine is ours, and the dance, and flowery wreaths, and women. To-day let me live well; none knows what may be to-morrow. 5.72<sup>14</sup>

I have only disjointed observations to make about particular details in Pessoa's English epigrams.<sup>15</sup> In *Inscriptions* I, "We pass and dream" may be an distant echo of Housman's translation of Horace, Ode 4.7, "we are dust and dreams." Earth "smiles" (*Inscriptions* I) in Greek literature, as in Homer, *Iliad* 19.362, the Homeric hymn to Apollo (l. 118), *Theognis* 9-10, and *Prometheus Bound* 90. The name "Chloe" of *Inscriptions* II occurs in two famous odes by Horace, 1.23 and 3.9. Many poems of the *Greek Anthology* are devoted to the death of a young girl or boy, as in this poem or *Inscriptions* VIII. The "toga o'er my head" of *Inscriptions* III may, possibly, be a reference to the "capite velato" ("with covered head") of Roman religious ceremony. Cecropian bees appear in Virgil's *Georgics* 4.177 and refer to the famous honey of Mt Hymettus.<sup>16</sup> Bees, like the toga, dice, and bowl that also appear in *Inscriptions*, appear regularly in the *Anthology*.

Pessoa's English has characteristically idiosyncratic features. The use of a single participial adjective modifying a noun, sometimes in unidiomatic or

<sup>14</sup> PIZARRO, FERRARI, and CARDIELLO (2010: 13) note that Pessoa's final words, written in English and dated 29 November 1935, seem to echo this poem. Pessoa wrote, "I know not what to-morrow will bring;" Paton translated Palladas, "none knows what may be tomorrow." It is a commonplace expression known from the Bible (Proverbs 27:1, Ecclesiastes 7:14, James 4:13-14) and especially from Horace (Odes 1.9, 1.11, and 3.29; Epistles 1.4.13), but Pessoa's words are closest to Paton's version of Palladas.

<sup>15</sup> In accepting the invitation to write on Pessoa from the perspective of an Anglophone classicist, I have omitted the indispensable preliminary step of learning Portuguese and so have not been able to profit from Ana Paula Quintela Ferreira Sottomayor, "Ecos da Poesia Grega nos Epitáfios de Fernando Pessoa," pp. 85-95 of *Actas do I Congresso Internacional de Estudos Pessoaanos* (Oporto: Brasília Editora, 1979), and Yara Frateschi Vieira, "Pessoa, Leitor da Anthologia Grega," in *Remate de Males*, Campinas, n.º 8, 1988, pp. 53-65.

<sup>16</sup> S. E. Winbolt's edition of Book IV of the *Georgics* (1902) is extant in Pessoa's Private Library (call number 8-560). It was part of the set books during his Form VI in Durban High School during 1904. Numerous lines, including l. 177, are scanned or marked in Pessoa's hand. In the margin next to this line Pessoa penned "M[oun]t Hymettus" (p. 10).

innovative ways, for instance, recurs in many of his epigrams (purposed wisdom, peopled shades, breathing traveller, fed man, thought whole). Juxtapositions that reverse active and passive verbs, sometimes oxymoronic, are common: "Some were as love loved,<sup>17</sup> some as prizes prized"; "Dreaming that I slept not, I slept my dream"; "I was sufficient to whom I sufficed"; "Life lived us, not we life"; "This soil treads me, that once I trod." When Pessoa deviates from English usage, it is sometimes hard to know how deliberately innovative the words are intended. "All this is something lack-of-something screening" is odd and striking, as is the description of light as "sight-sick." But "Have been succeeded by those who still built" (for "by those who were still building" or "still continued to build") and "I looked toward where gods seem" seem to have been chosen for the sake of meter and end-rhyme rather than to renovate the resources of the language. Likewise, it is not clear whether his off-rhymes ("prized/sufficed," "too/so," "is/kiss") are careless or are participating in the early modernist experimentation in slant rhyme.

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<sup>17</sup> Editor's note: in the original publication we read "loved loved." There are no manuscripts extant of this poem.

## Annex I

Epigrams from the *Greek Anthology* noted by Pessoa in the margin of his copy of Paton's edition and translation. For the items with asterisk, indicating cases where Pessoa's annotation was more extensive than usual, see Annex II for more information. The eight items followed by a dagger indicate that Pessoa translated them in *Athena* n.º 2, November 1924; the double dagger indicates the unpublished Portuguese translations (5.77, 6.77, and 7.84 are excluded for having no markings).

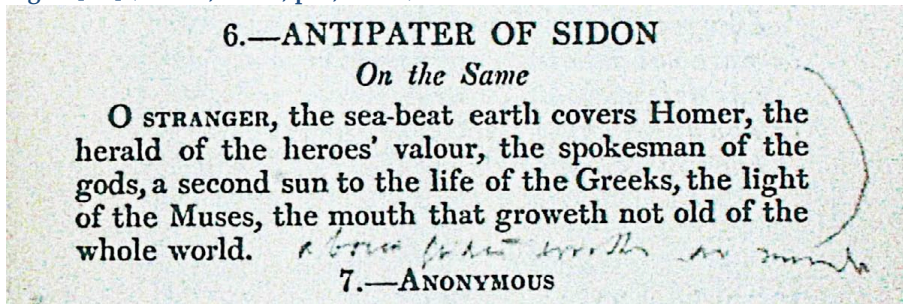
5.11 ‡	*7.80	7.372	10.87
5.12	7.96	7.441 †	*10.88
5.14	7.112	7.559	*10.96
5.21 ‡	*7.121	7.461	10.105
5.34 †	*7.133	7.468	10.106
5.39	7.144 ‡	7.469 †	10.108
5.40	7.173	7.494	10.109
5.41	7.178	7.533	10.113
5.42	7.189	*7.539	10.116
5.51 ‡	7.199	7.545	10.118
5.67 ‡	7.211	7.565	10.124
5.68	*7.217	*7.603	
5.72	7.219	*7.621	11.3
5.78 ‡	7.220	7.663	11.8
5.79	*7.249	7.663	11.43
5.80 †	7.254a	7.669	*11.47
5.81 †	7.255	7.670	11.89
5.156	7.256	7.671	11.198
5.158	7.258	7.676	11.215
	7.259	7.704	11.235
6.1 †	7.282	7.746	11.237
	7.306		11.310
7.3	7.309	10.3	11.333
*7.6	*7.320	10.26	
7.16 †	*7.334	10.31	12.228
7.20 †	*7.336	10.34	12.235
7.23	*7.337	10.38	12. 248
7.23b	7.339	10.47	
7.33 ‡	7.341	10.52	
7.39	7.342	10.58	API 13
7.43	7.346	10.72	API 248
7.62	7.348 ‡	10.73	API 301
*7.63	7.350	10.82	API304
7.72	7.355	10.85	



## Annex II

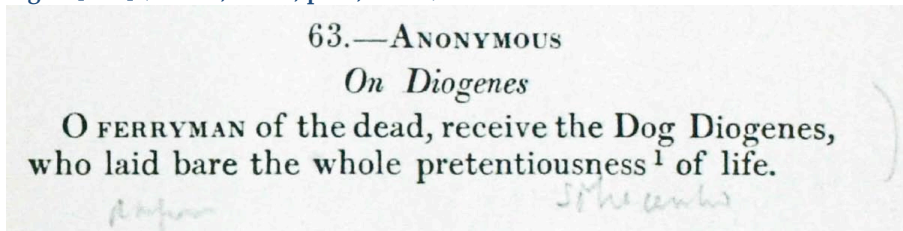
Details and transcriptions of Pessoa's marginalia

Fig. 2. [7.6] (PATON, vol. II, p. 7, detail)



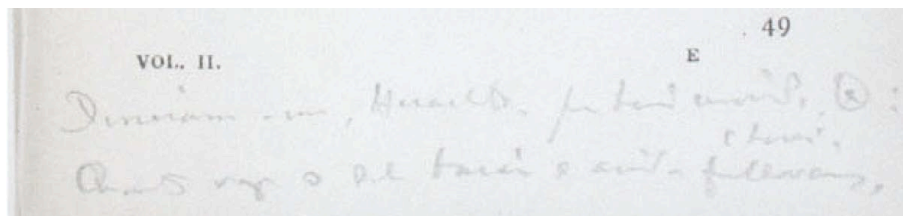
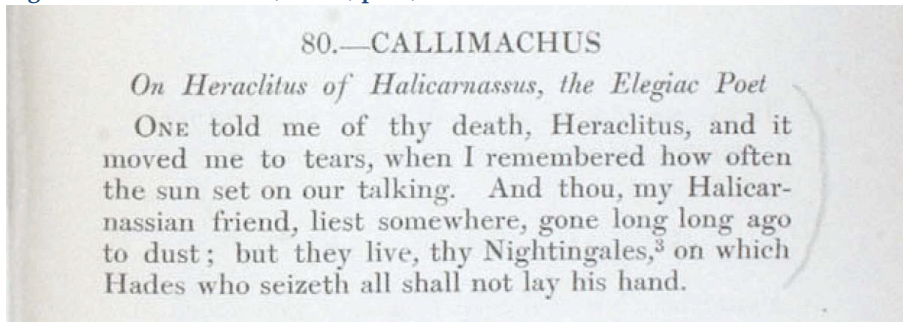
Translation: "a boca que não avelha no mundo"

Fig. 3. [7.63] (PATON, vol. II, p. 39, detail)



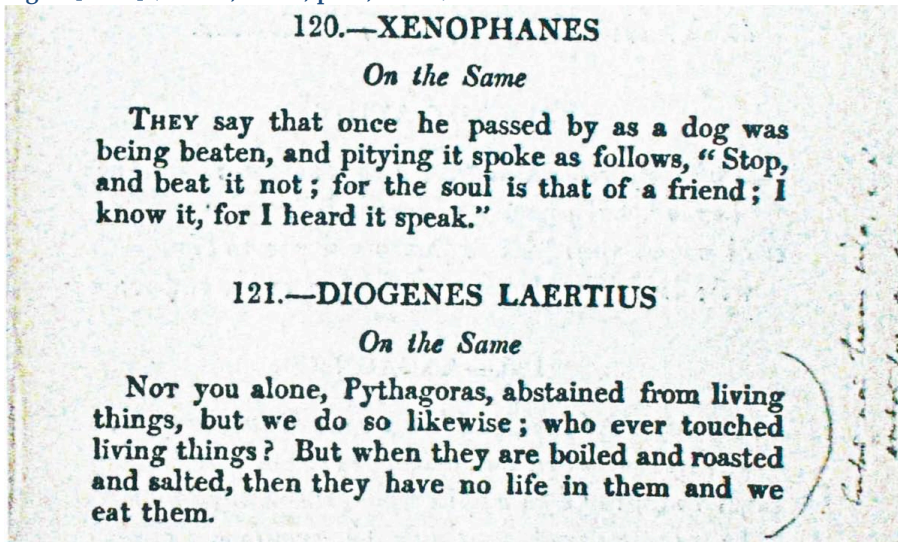
Translation: "rapou" "sobrecenho"

Figs. 4 & 5. [7.80] (PATON, vol. II, p. 49, details)



Translation: "Disseram-me, Heraclito, que haveis morrido: /e/ [↓ chorei]. Quantas vezes o sol baixa e ainda fallamos."

Fig. 6. [7.121] (PATON, vol. II, p. 71, detail)



Translation: "Então não teem vida, e é então que os comemos."

Fig. 7. [7.133] (PATON, vol. II, p. 77, detail)

Pessoa underlines the footnote as follows:

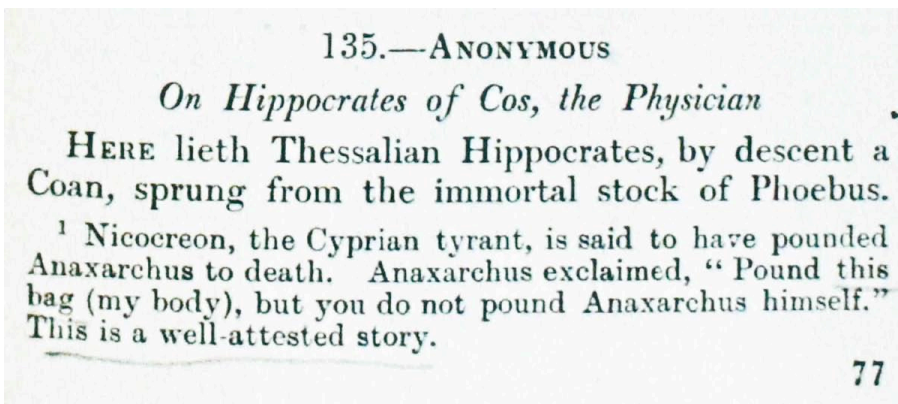
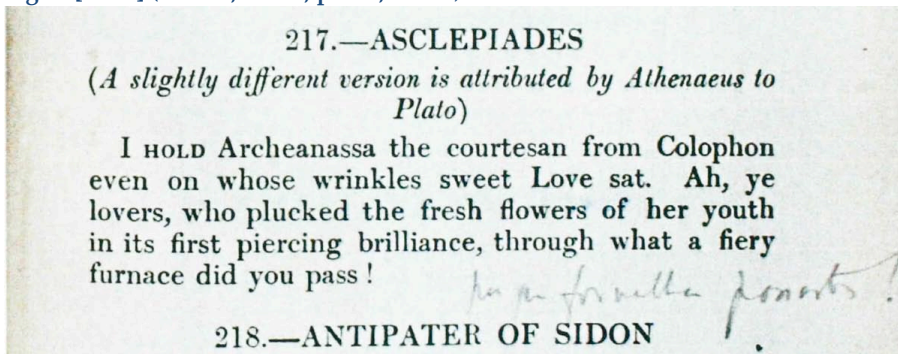
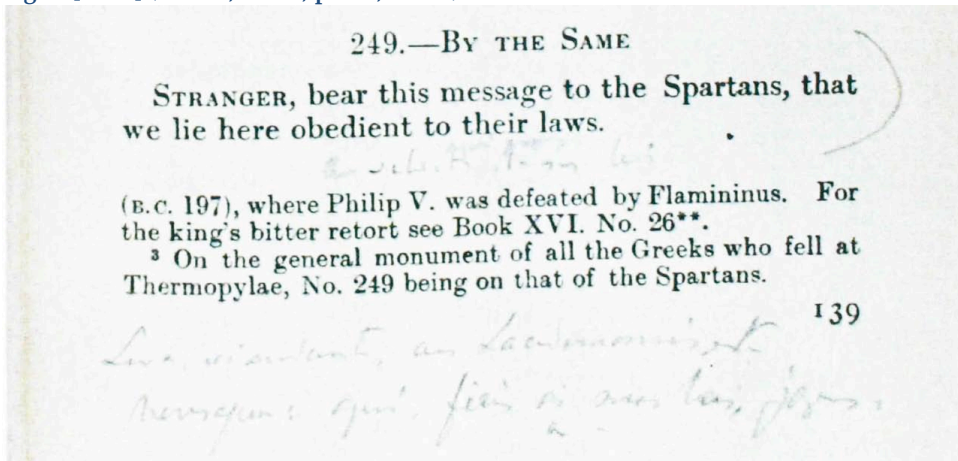


Fig. 8. [7.217] (PATON, vol. II, p. 123, detail)



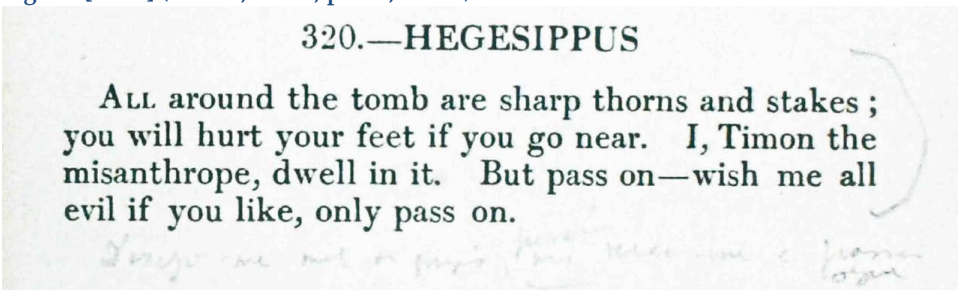
Translation: "Mas que fornalha passaste!"

Fig. 9. [7.249] (PATON, vol. II, p. 139, detail)



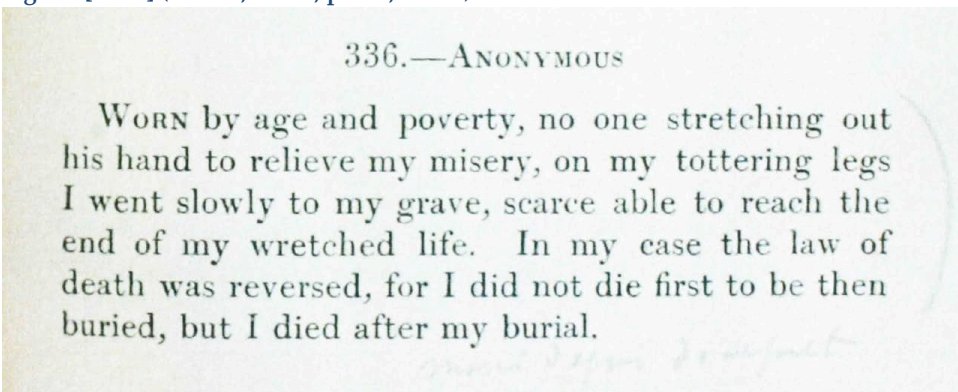
Translations: “[Que \*obedientes [↑ aqui jazemos] ás suas leis” and “Leva viandante, aos Lacedemonianos esta | Mensagem: aqui fieis ás [↓ a] suas leis, jazemos.”

Fig. 10. [7.320] (PATON, vol. II, p. 173, detail)



Translation: “Deseja-me mal se quizeres, mas [↑ pore] deixa-me e passa [↓ segue]”

Fig. 11. [7.336] (PATON, vol. II, p. 181, detail)



Translation: “morri depois de sepulto”

Fig. 12. [7.539] (PATON, vol. II, p. 290, detail)

Pessoa writes a thin vertical line next to the Greek title.

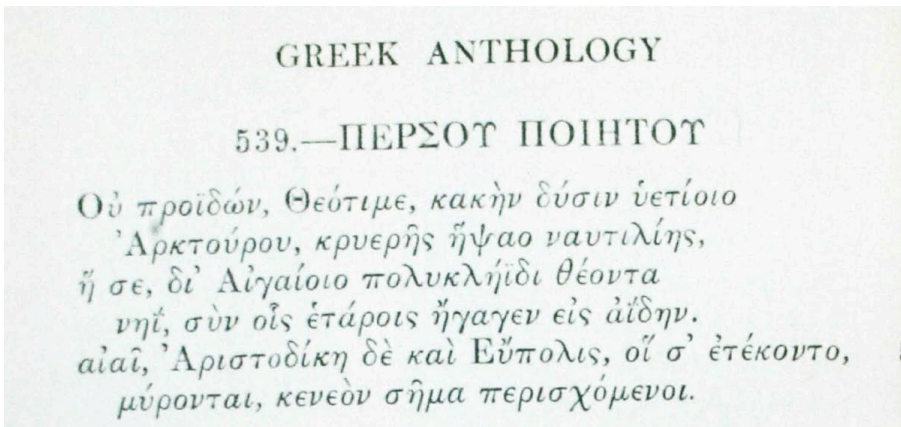
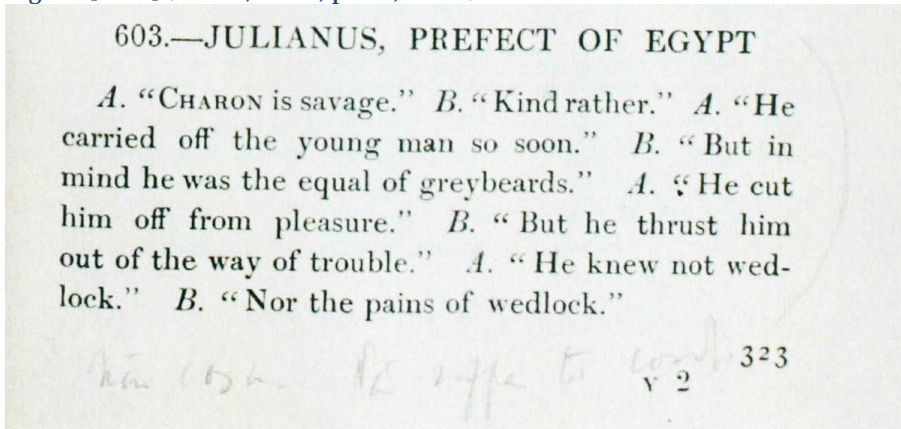
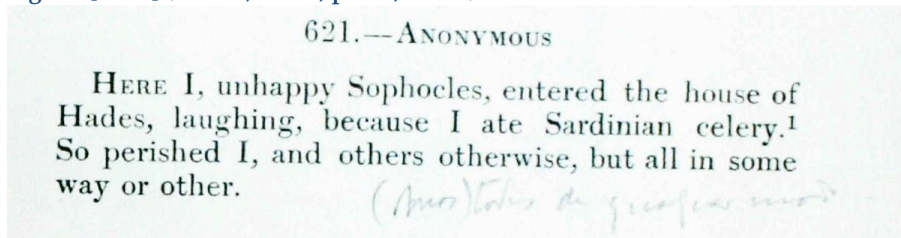


Fig. 13. [7.603] (PATON, vol. II, p. 323, detail)



Translations: "Não casa" and "Não sofre ter casado"

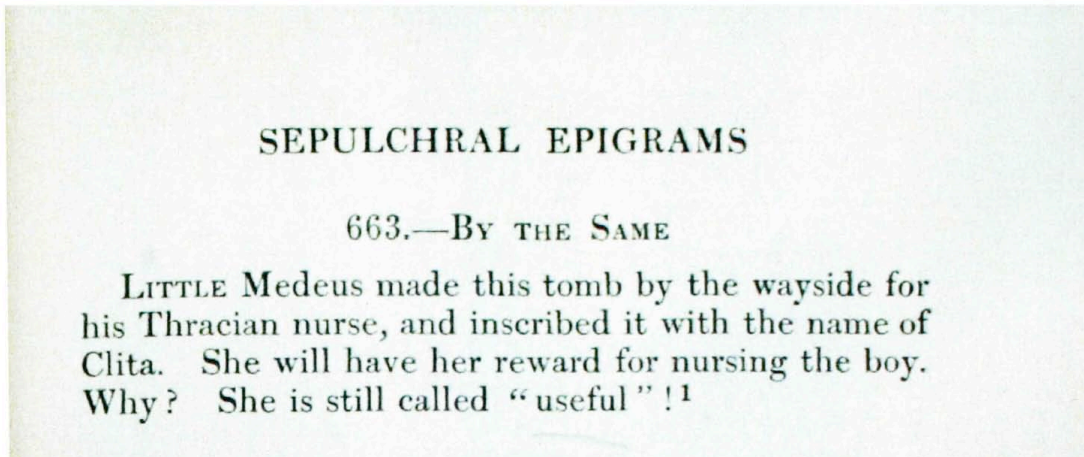
Fig. 14. [7.621] (PATON, vol. II, p. 333, detail)



Translation: "/Mas/ todos de qualquer modo"

Figs. 15 & 16. [7.663] (PATON, vol. II, p. 355, details)

The epithet "useful" is underlined in the translation:



Pessoa underlines the footnote:

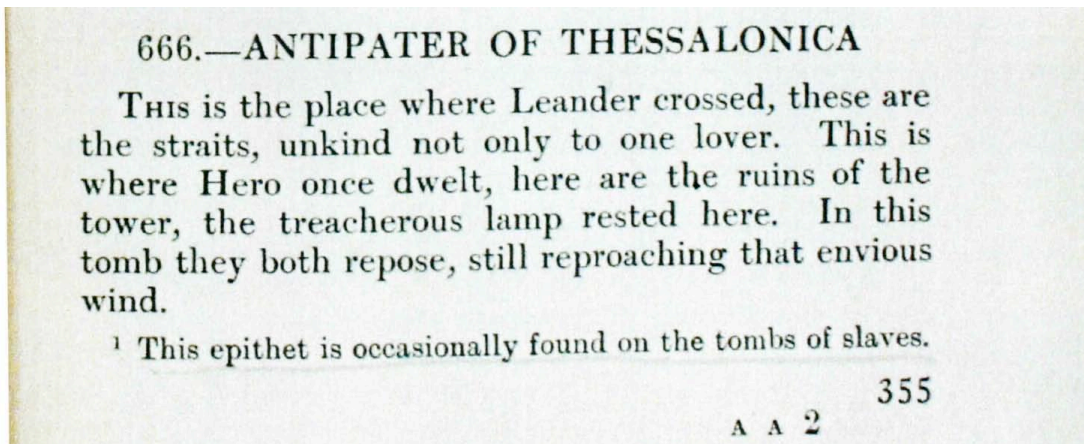


Fig. 17. [10.88] (PATON, vol. IV, p. 49, detail)

Pessoa underlines the opening clause:

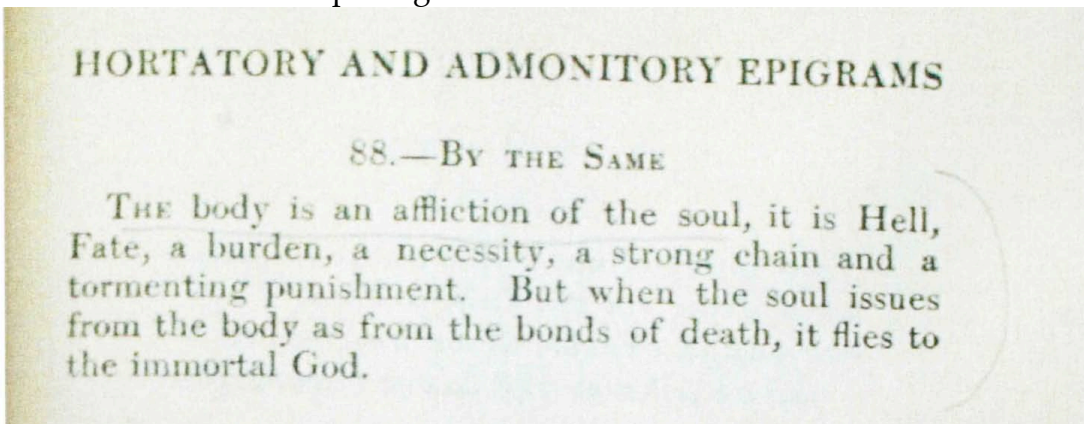
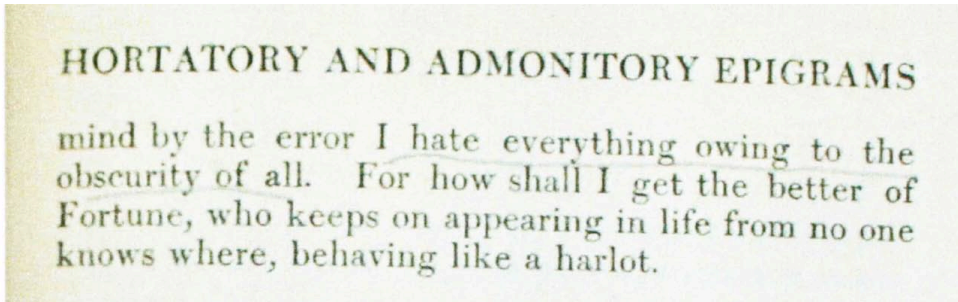
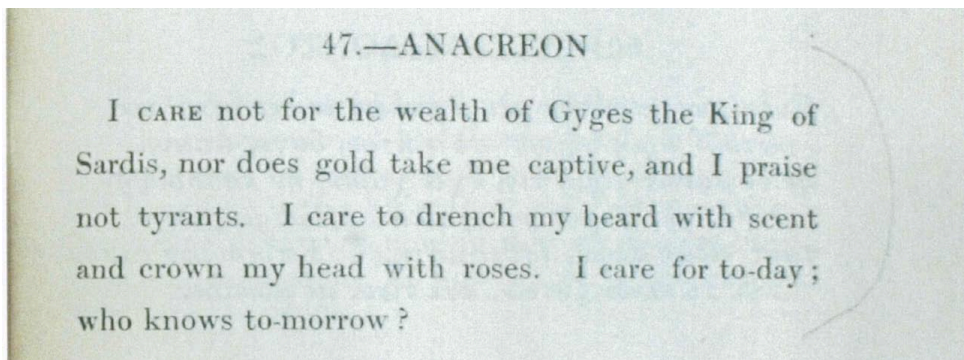
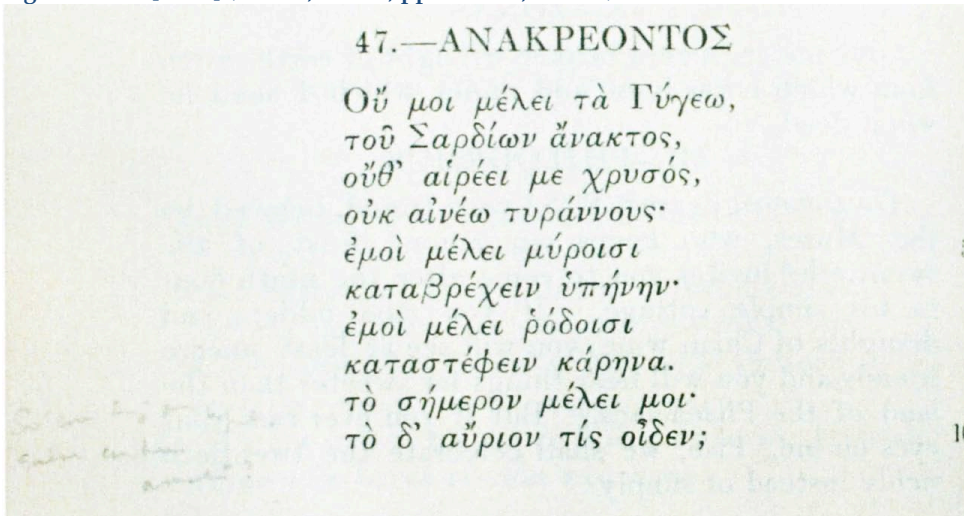


Fig. 18. [10.96 (PATON, vol. IV, p. 53, detail)]

Pessoa underlines the sentence:



Figs. 19 &amp; 20. [11.47] (PATON, vol. IV, pp. 92 &amp; 93, details)



Translation: "Só com hoje me importo. | Quem conhece amanhã?"

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