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The Age of a *parthenos*. A new Epitaph from Aphrodisias

Abstract: A new posthumous honorific inscription from Aphrodisias (2nd cent. CE) for Melition Tatia uses the expression ‘she died at the age of a *parthenos*’. Usually, *παρθένος* denotes multiple things at the same time: virginity, unmarried status, and youth. The new text from Aphrodisias reminds us of the primary meaning of *parthenos* is the age class of girls. In many inscriptions *parthenos* does not refer to virginity but to age.

Keywords: *Parthenos*; age; Aphrodisias; statue base; *gymnasion*.

I first met Sencer Şahin in 1997 during the Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy in Rome. Friendship soon followed, on a shared walk through the ruins of Ostia. A few years later (2005), we co-organized – along with Charalambos Kritzas, then Director of the Athens Epigraphic Museum – the first Greek-Turkish Epigraphical Conference in Athens; another conference followed in Antalya (2012). I hope that these encounters between Greek and Turkish epigraphers become a tradition. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I contribute to a volume in memory of Şahin.

I first presented the following inscription from Aphrodisias during the second Greek-Turkish Epigraphy Conference in Antalya.¹ The text is engraved on a marble statue base that was found integrated into the Late Antique city wall (Fig. 1).² The base is damaged on the edges of the left and right sides, and part of the text is not visible because it is still built into the wall (height 90.7 cm, width 38.2 cm, depth 30.3 cm, letters 2.5-3 cm). On the basis of the standard lettering, it can be dated to the second century CE (Fig. 2).

Ἡ βουλή καὶ ὁ δῆ-
 მოს ἑτείμησαν
 ταῖς καλλίσταις
 4 τειμαῖς Μελί-
 πιον Ἀρτεμιδώ-
 ρου Τατίαν, θυγα-
 τέρα Ἀρτεμιδώ-
 8 ρου [τ]οῦ Ἀρτεμιδώ-
 ρου τοῦ Καλλικλέ-
 [ο]υ[ς Π]απίου, τελευ-
 [τήσασ]αν ἡλικία
 12 [vac παρ]θένον vac



Fig. 1

· ΔΟΥΛΗ·ΚΑΙΟΔΗ
 ΜΟΣΕΤΕΙΜΗΣΑΝ
 ΤΑΙΣ ΚΑΛΛΙΣΤΑΙΣ
 ΤΕΙΜΑΙΣ ΜΕΛΙ
 ΤΙΟΝΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΩ
 ΡΟΥΤΑΤΙΑΝΟΧΤΑ
 ΤΕΡΑΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΩΧ
 ΡΟΥΤΟΥΑΡΤΕΜΙΔΩ
 ΡΟΥΤΟΚΑΛΛΙΚΛΕ
 Υ ΑΠΙΟΥΤΕΛΕΥ
 Η· ΑΝΗΛΙΚΙΑ
 ΘΕΝΟΝ

Fig. 2

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¹ I thank Michael A. Fowler (Columbia) for correcting my English and Marco Fantuzzi for his remarks. References to the inscriptions of Aphrodisias are from J. Reynolds, C. Roueché, and G. Bodard, *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* (abbreviated IPh2007: <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/index.html>).

² The exact location is in the west-east stretch of the Northeast wall, 7.5 m west of the corner to the north of the water channel gate (N 909.0, E 902.0). The inscription was discovered in 2004 (Field reports: I 04.03).

'The council and the people honoured with the finest honours Melition of Artemidoros Tatia, daughter of Artemidoros Papias, son of Artemidoros, grandson of Kallikles, who died at the age of a parthenos.

The text belongs to a large corpus of more or less standardized posthumous honorific inscriptions from Aphrodisias, which state that an individual was honoured by the council and the people and/or sometimes by the *gerousia* and the *neoi*. It is not known where the base with the statue or bust of the deceased girl originally stood. In some cases, the honorific inscriptions explicitly stipulate that statues and painted images were to be erected in 'sacred and public places'³; yet, the great number of preserved bases makes it unlikely that this was always the case. Many of them must have stood near the grave of the honoured individual.⁴ As we may infer from expressions such as ταῖς καλλίσταις τειμαῖς, ταῖς καλλίσταις καὶ μεγίσταις τειμαῖς, ταῖς πρώταις καὶ μεγίσταις τειμαῖς, and ταῖς καλίσταις καὶ πρεπούσαις τειμαῖς, there was a certain hierarchy of honours paid to a deceased individual, presumably ranging from the offering of a crown to a public funeral and the erection of one or more images. The 'fairest', 'greatest', and 'first' honours certainly included the erection of a statue. In many cases, the text explicitly states that the honours were awarded posthumously,⁵ and this can be assumed at least for some of the other honorary inscriptions on statue bases that are introduced with the stereotypical phrase ἡ βουλή καὶ ὁ δῆμος ἐτείμησαν ταῖς καλλίσταις (et sim.) τειμαῖς.

The full name of the honoured girl is Melition Tatia and that of her father Artemidoros Papias.⁶ According to the common practice in Aphrodisias, the second name is given after the patronymic.⁷ In this case, the filiation (lines 4–5) is repeated after the second name (lines 5–6), this time with the addition of the word θυγατέρα. The names Tatia, Artemidoros, and Papias are very common in Aphrodisias, while Melition and Kallikles are less so.⁸ Papias was often used as a second name.⁹ The individuals mentioned in this inscription are otherwise unattested.

The most interesting aspect of the new inscription is the expression ἡλικία [παρ]θένον (lines 11–12), that is, the use of the word παρθένος to denote age. This expression is paralleled by the phrase τελευτήσασαν παρθένον ἔτι, which is employed in another epitaph from Aphrodisias, however, without an explicit reference to an age class.¹⁰ A similar expression can be restored in the posthumous honorific inscription for Pyrrhos, son of Zenon, also from Aphrodisias: [τελ]ευτήσαν|[τα παιδός?] ἡλικί|[α] or [ἐν παιδός?] ἡλικί|[α].¹¹

Although παρθένος is often translated as 'virgin',¹² the principle meaning in the documentary evidence of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods is 'girl' and 'unmarried girl'. In banquets and distributions of the Imperial period, benefactors are praised for including γυναῖκες καὶ παρθένοι, that is, married and

³ E.g. IPh2007 12.704.

⁴ For a catalogue of portrait statues and a survey of the statue bases see Smith et al. 2006.

⁵ E.g., 1.160, 1.171, 7.8, 11.18, 12.4, 12.5, 12.20, 12.29, 12.30, 12.104, 12.105, 12.203, 12.301, 12.306, 12.307, 12.518, 12.520, 12.706, 12.905, 12.919, 13.6, 13.105, 13.701, 15.262.

⁶ The names have been included in the prosopography of Bourtzinakou 2012 no. 1578 (Melition Tatia); no. 522 (Artemidoros Papias). See also no. 521 and 1396 for the other ancestors, Artemidoros and Kallikles. Cf. LGPN Vb s.vv. Ἀρτεμίδωρος 69–70, Καλλικλῆς 6, and Μελίτιον 2.

⁷ See Chaniotis 2013, 207–229.

⁸ Artemidoros: Bourtzinakou 2012 nos. 471–535; LGPN Vb, s.v. nos. 26–78. Kallikles: Bourtzinakou 2012 nos. 1394–1398; LGPN Vb, s.v. nos. 2–6. Melition: Bourtzinakou 2012 nos. 1576–1578; LGPN Vb, s.v. nos. 1–3. Papias: Bourtzinakou 2012 nos. 1929–1960; LGPN Vb, s.v. nos. 1–42. Tatia: Bourtzinakou 2012 nos. 2146–2159; LGPN Vb, s.v. nos. 1–20.

⁹ Chaniotis 2013 nos. 8, 10, 11, 20, 51, and 91.

¹⁰ IPh2007 12.518 (second century CE?). Cf. IPh2007 13.5: τελευτήσαντα ἔτι νέον.

¹¹ IPh2007 13.7 lines 12–14 (second/third century CE): [τελ]ευτήσαν|[τα . . c.7 . . ἡλικί|[α]. Cf. IPr. 102: μετηλλαχθέναι τὸν βίον, [ἔτι μὲν ἐμ] παιδός ἡλικία ὑπάρχοντα.

¹² On aspects of virginity see Sissa 1990.

unmarried women.¹³ The poor *parthenoi* in Xanthos who received dowries from a benefactor (ἐκδίδωσιν δὲ καὶ τὰς πενιχρὰς παρθένους) were girls of marriageable age.¹⁴ In an inscription from Didyma, a priestess approached the oracle in order to seek an explanation for the fact that ever since she had assumed the office there had been an extraordinary number of appearances of gods in the dreams ‘of both girls (παρθέναι) and (adult/married) women (γυναῖκες), of both men and children’.¹⁵ Another unambiguous instance in which the word denotes an unmarried woman is the epitaph of Prosodos in Teos, who is presented as speaking from her grave: ‘at the age of 19 I was still a παρθένος; then I married’.¹⁶

In the new inscription from Aphrodisias, the word παρθένος is used to indicate Melition’s age at her death. Funerary inscriptions for παρθέναι usually commemorate girls who died before or shortly after they had reached puberty and marriageable age; when the age is indicated, it usually ranges from 8 to 16 years.¹⁷ The association of παρθένος with age allows us also to understand properly a grave epigram from Karza in Paphlagonia (mid-third century CE), which has puzzled some scholars.¹⁸ The epigram narrates the story of a 14-year-old married girl, who committed suicide in order not to be molested by the barbarians (Goths?) who had abducted her. Although the epigram states that the young woman (κόρη) ‘had given pleasure to her dear husband for only seven months’ (ἑπτὰ μόνων μηνῶν δὲ φίλον πόσιν εὐφράνασα), according to the next line she ‘left the παρθενικὸν φῶς at the age of fourteen’ (παρθενικὸν λίπε φῶς τετράς καὶ δεκέτης). Domitilla did not depart life as a married virgin, untouched by her husband; she died still as a girl. Παρθενικὸν φῶς signifies ‘young age’.¹⁹

Since ἡλικία does not only mean age but also a legally defined age class,²⁰ it is worth considering the possible implications of the new inscription for the society of Aphrodisias. In the documentary evidence, the παρθέναι are well attested as an age class that corresponded to that of the παῖδες. For instance, the lists of delegations sent to the sanctuary of Apollo in Klaros associate the παρθέναι with the ‘boys’ (παῖδες, ἡῖθαι);²¹ similarly, in Ephesos, ornaments for the statue of Artemis were brought by παῖδες and παρθέναι.²² The explicit correspondence between παρθέναι and παῖδες as age classes raises the question of the institutional aspects of this age class. Significant evidence for this question comes

¹³ E.g. Didyma 279: δοῦς ταῖς [γ]υναῖξιν καὶ ταῖς παρθένους διανομήν.

¹⁴ FXanthos VII 67 (2nd cent. CE).

¹⁵ Didyma 496: τοῦτο δὲ καὶ διὰ παρθένων καὶ γυναικῶν, τοῦτο δὲ καὶ δι’ ἀρρένων καὶ νηπίων.

¹⁶ LW 116: ἐν<νέ>α κα<ι> δέ<κ>’ ἔτων ἡ<μ>ην ἔτι παρθέν<ο>ς, εἶτ’ ἐγάμησα. Cf. GV 2046: οὐ νόμφαν, ἔτι παρθέ[νον].

¹⁷ SEG 16 674: παρθένη ἐτῶν ις’; 31 564: ὀκταετής παρθένος; 39 485 C: πέντε καὶ δέκα ἔτη παρθένη; IG IV 196: δέκα γὰρ τέσσαρ’ ἐκπλήσασ’ ἔτη πέμπτῳ τὸ σῶμα καταλέλοιπα παρθένος, ἄπαις, ἄνυμφος, ἡῖθεος; IG IX.2.649: [παρ]θένος ... μέλλου[σα] γάμψ δεκαπενταετής μείγνυσθαι; IPerinthos 219: πένθ’ ἐτέων οὐσα καὶ δέκα πρὸς τοῖς, παρθένος; CIG 3118: ἐτέων κύρσασα δις [ἑπτὰ?], παρθένος; IKPolis 148: παρθένῳ θυγατρὶ ἐτῶν ιγ’; MAMA VII 155: παρθένῳ ἐσθλοτά[τῃ] δεκαπεντάτει; MAMA VIII 175: ἐτῶν ιε’ πα[ρθ]ῆναν; IGLS III.1.915: πα[ρθ]ῆνε ... ἐννεετή; IGLA, no. 347: παρθένος ἄωρος (ἐτῶν ιε’; IGR I 1232: παρθένος ἐτῶν ις’. But even Berenike, the daughter of Ptolemy III and Berenike, who died shortly before or after her first birthday was designated as a παρθένος, was honoured as ἄνασσα παρθένων, and received sacrifices from the daughters of the Egyptian priests (OGIS 56 B, 238 BCE). A love charm associates the παρθέναι with boys before puberty (μέλλακες): SEG 38 1838 lines 12–13: μέλλαξι τε κ[αὶ παρ]θῆνοις.

¹⁸ See the bibliography in SEG 34 1271; 37 1092; 47 1697.

¹⁹ Merkelbach – Stauber 2001, 293 no. 10/01/12: ‘das Leben eines Mädchens’. Cf. Stracca 1996/97, 15–32 (‘comportamento “virginale”’). As Marco Fantuzzi pointed out to me, παρθενικὸν φῶς may also allude to the fact that Domitilla remained chaste with respect to her abductors.

²⁰ E.g. IKaunos 30: ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν παισὶν καὶ ἐφήβοις ἡλικίας; CIG 3088: μέση, νεωτέρα, πρεσβυτέρα ἡλικία in the gymnasium of Teos; IPessinous, 170: παιδῶν ἡλικία.

²¹ SEG 37 961 lines 10–11: παιδῶν καὶ παρθένων ὀνόματα; SEG 37 973 line 8 and 974 line 5: ἡῖθαι παρεγένοντο καὶ παρθέναι; Robert 1969, 300–301: παρεγένοντο παῖδες καὶ παρθέναι καὶ ὑμνησαν τοὺς θεοὺς.

²² SEG 34 1124: προσήνηκαν τῇ θεῷ τον κόσμον παῖδες καὶ παρθέναι.

from Pergamon in the early first century CE. Here, the corporations and boards that honoured an anonymous individual with wreaths included the ‘officials responsible for the orderly conduct of the *παρθένοι* and the *παρθένοι*’ (οἱ ἐπὶ τῆς εὐκοσμίας τῶν παρθένων καὶ αἱ παρθένοι).²³ If the *παρθένοι* could offer honours, exactly like the members of a gymnasium (οἱ ἀλε[ι]φόμενο[ι] ἐν τῷ πανηγυρικ<ῶ> γυμνασίῳ), this can only mean that they could meet and make decisions as a clearly defined group with some form of corporate organization, analogous to that of the *ephebes*. Another Late Hellenistic inscription records the names of *παρθένοι* who were victorious in competitions in the gymnasium; the text was inscribed under the supervision of the man who served as ἐπὶ τῆς εὐκοσμίας τῶν παρθένων.²⁴ This office is also attested in an inscription copied in Smyrna but attributed by Louis Robert to Pergamon.²⁵ Robert, like E. Ziebarth before him, plausibly assumed that the organization of the *παρθένοι* was connected with the gymnasium.²⁶

Apart from the education of the *παρθένοι* in the gymnasium, in the cities in which such education was provided, their age class was certainly also relevant for rituals and cultic functions reserved for unmarried girls.²⁷ A decree of Iasos concerning honours for Queen Laodike (ca. 195–190) stipulates the annual election of a priestess, who had to be a *παρθένος* and was not allowed to serve a second time.²⁸ In Magnesia on the Maeander, the *paidonomos* and the *gynaikonomos* appointed nine boys (*παῖδες*) and nine *παρθένοι*, whose parents were still alive, to participate in a celebration for Zeus Sosipolis (early second century BCE).²⁹ In Teos, the cult personnel designated as *ιερατείας παρθένοι* must have been girls in the service of a priestess (first century BCE);³⁰ a similar service existed in Pergamon, as we may infer from a dedication made by the priestess of Athena Nikephoros and Polias and the *parthenoi*.³¹ And as we have already seen, boys and *παρθένοι* performed cultic services in Ephesos and Klaros (see notes 21 and 22). In the above cases, the word comprises all three properties of a *παρθένος*: she is a girl (ca. 8–14 years), unmarried, and a virgin. The principal meaning concerns girlhood; the other meanings, unmarried status and virginity, follow from young age. Still, there are also cases in which the virginity of the *parthenos* who fulfilled a cultic duty was explicitly demanded. For instance, an oracle of Apollo Klarios (first century CE) asked Sidyma to appoint annually as priestess of Artemis a girl (περὶ νεωκόρου παρθένου), in order that the pure rituals ([ἀ]γνά θεᾶς ἀσινή τε ... θυηπόλα τεῖμια) may be performed by the hands of a *parthenos* (παρθενικαῖς παλάμαισι); the priestess was to be unmarried (μὴ προσάγειν θαλάμοις ἱερηπόλον, ἦν ἀπὸ λέκτρων), young (νέαν), and untouched (ἄθικτον).³²

In Aphrodisias, as elsewhere in Asia Minor, the word *parthenos* designated an age class of girls belonging to citizen families. An analogous division of the young male citizens in the age classes of *παῖδες*, *ἔφηβοι*, and *νέοι* is known to have existed in this city.³³ The age class of the *parthenoi* would have been

²³ IPergamon II 463.

²⁴ Robert 1937, 58 note 4.

²⁵ CIG 3185; Robert 1937, 56–59.

²⁶ Ziebart 1914, 40; Robert 1937, 58.

²⁷ See e.g. Brulé 1987; Parker 2005, 218–252; Connelly 2007, 33–41. For the Archaic and Classical periods, see Brelich 1969.

²⁸ Iasos 4, lines 33–36. αἰρείσθω κα[τ’ - - ἐ]νια[υτὸν - - ἱέρειαν] παρθένον βασιλίσσης Ἀφρο[δίτης Λα]οδίκης: ... [καὶ αὐ]τῆι μὴ ἐξέστω δις ἱερητεῦ[σαι].

²⁹ IMagnesia 98: ἀποστέλλειν δὲ τοὺς παιδονόμους παῖδας ἑννέα ἀμφιθαλεῖς, ἀποστέλλειν δὲ καὶ τοὺς γυναικονόμους παρθένους ἑννέα ἀμφιθαλεῖς.

³⁰ CIG 3098.

³¹ IPergamon II 360 (early 2nd cent. CE).

³² TAM II 174.

³³ The *paides*, *epheboi* and the *neoi* are directly attested. *Paides*: e.g. IAPH2007 1.177; 11.58; 11.60 etc. For *paides* in the athletic contests at Aphrodisias see Roueché 1993 nos. 52, 70, 71, 78–86, 91. *Epheboi* and *neoi*: see Chaniotis, forthcoming. The age class of the elderly elite citizens is indirectly attested by the existence of the *gerousia*, for which see

relevant for education and rituals, for which direct evidence from Aphrodisias is lacking. The posthumous honorific inscription for the high priestess Claudia Tryphosa Pauleina, who died ‘still a παρθένος’ is not relevant in this context. She served as high priestess neither in her own right nor as a *parthenos*, but rather only in conjunction with her father, the high priest Claudius Apollonios – presumably because her mother had died.³⁴ *Parthenoi* may have officiated in the cult of Aphrodite, possibly in the ritual of ἀνθηφορία; however, the main cultic function in this ritual was certainly not reserved for *parthenoi*. Three out of four women designated as ἀνθηφόρος τῆς Ἀφροδείτης were married when they held this office.³⁵

Usually, παρθένος denotes multiple things at the same time: virginity, unmarried status, and youth. For instance, when in grave inscriptions a man states that he had his wife ἐκ παρθενίας or designates her as παρθενική ἄλοχος, all these meanings overlap.³⁶ The new text from Aphrodisias reminds us of the primary meaning of *parthenos*: the age class of girls.

Abbreviated Literatur

- | | |
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Giannopoulos 2008, 232–240. A new epigraphic find documents the existence of a separate bath for the *gerontes* (γερούσιον βαλανεῖον).

³⁴ I APh 2007 12.518. I follow the view of Campanile 1994, 22–25 according to whom high priestesses did not serve in their own right. They only served as the female counterparts of a male relative, usually a husband or, in exceptional cases, a father.

³⁵ I APh 2007 1.159 and 12.532 (Diogeneia); 12.531 (Aurelia Messouleia Satorneila); 1.183 (Aurelia Celestina); 1.187 (the wife of Septimius Chares Aineias). Only Iulia Paula (5.210) was unmarried.

³⁶ E.g. SEG 32 612: τῆ ἰδία συμ]βίῳ ἐκ παρθενείας; IPerinthos 218: παρθενικήν δ’ ἄλοχον; MAMA IV 83: ὁ πρῶτος λύσας ζώματα παρθενίας.

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 zet

Bir *parthenos*'un Yaşı. Aphrodisias'tan yeni bir Mezar Yazıtı

Aphrodisias'tan İ.S. 2. yy.da Melition Tatia iin hazırlanmıř yeni bir onurlandırma yazıtında “*parthenos* ađında  ld ” ifadesi yer almaktadır. Παρθ νος s zc đ  genel olarak b nyesinde aynı anda pekok anlam barındırmaktadır: bekaret, evlenmemiř olma stat s  ve genlik. Aphrodisias'tan bu yeni belge bize *parthenos*'un “yař kategorisi” olarak ilk anlamını hatırlatmaktadır. Zira pekok yazıtta *parthenos* s zc đ  bakireliđe deđil yařa iřaret etmektedir.

Anahtar s zc kler: *Parthenos*; yař; Aphrodisias; heykel kaidesi; *gymnasion*.