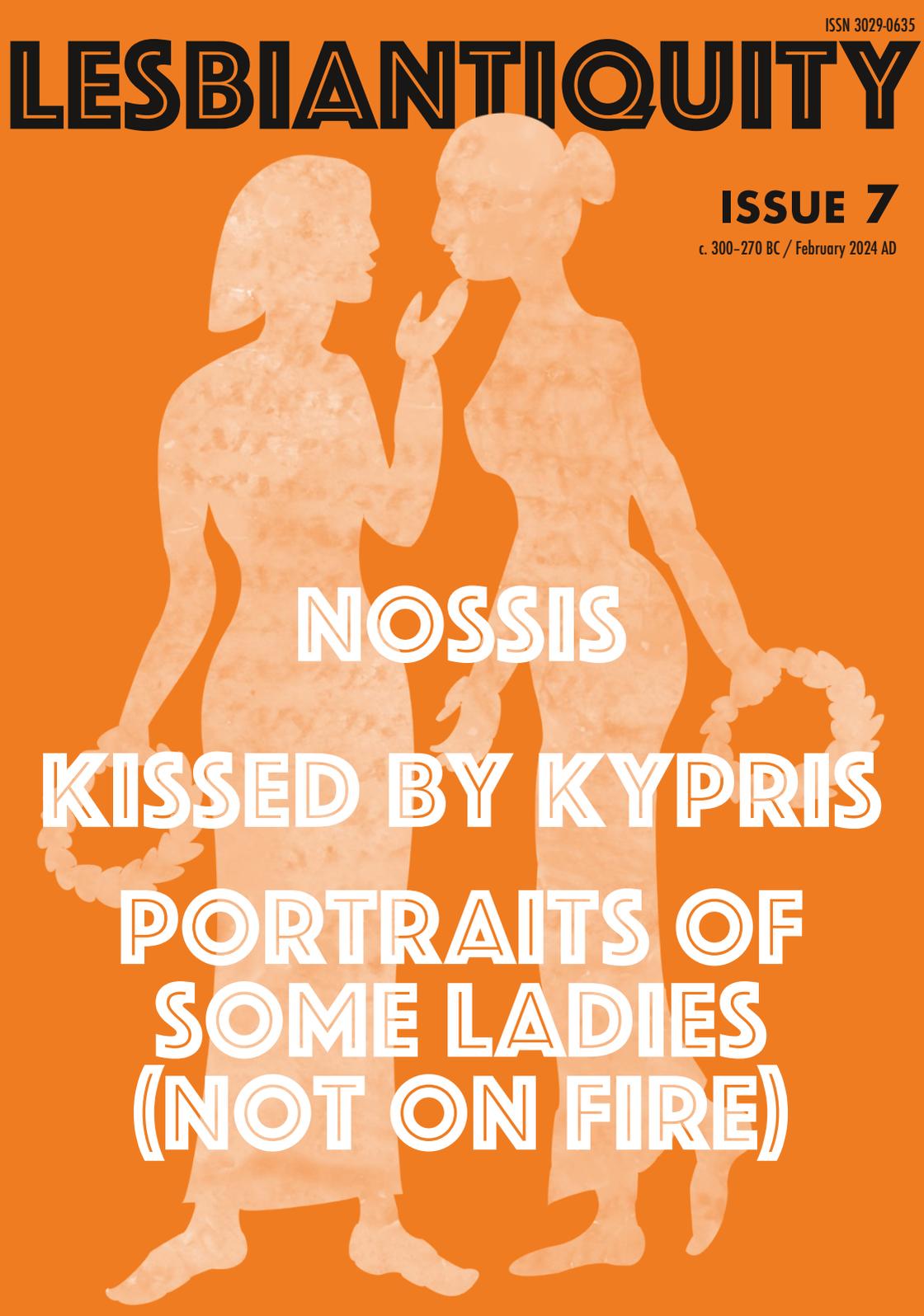


LESBIANTIQUITY

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NOSSIS

KISSED BY KYPRIS

**PORTRAITS OF
SOME LADIES
(NOT ON FIRE)**

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Nossis translation, introduction, and notes © Amanda Kubic 2024

Greek text from: D.L. Page, *Epigrammata Graeca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975);
W.R. Paton, *Anthologia Graeca* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916)

Back cover art: 'Her Portrait' © Emily Setzer 2024

THE TRANSLATOR

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I am a scholar of Comparative Literature and Classical Reception Studies and a bisexual woman. My current doctoral work explores how women poets and performance artists creatively engage classical texts and images through a logic of disembodiment to critique the idealization of a 'classical' body. I analyze modernist and postmodern works by women in poetry and dance, in English and modern Greek, demonstrating how they perform fragmented, choral, metamorphosing, and phantom aspects of the Greco-Roman corpus. I've published on topics like the American poet H.D.'s modernist Sapphic epithalamia and Irish artist Mary Duffy's disability-informed reception of the Venus de Milo. I presently live in Ann Arbor, Michigan.



ΝΟΣΣΙΣ

Nossis is one of the few women poets from Greek antiquity whose work survives today. Twelve epigrams have come down to us, dating to the 3rd century BCE. Nossis was from Epizephryian Locri, a city in the Calabrian region of Italy.¹ As is clear in 11 GP / AP 7.718, Nossis viewed her work as part of the legacy of the archaic lyric poet Sappho. She declares herself 'like' / 'equal to' this most famous Lesbian lyric poet, and her work reveals a similar interest in celebrating the beauty of women and building a woman-centered poetic world, all through a uniquely subjective point of view.

Some scholars have argued that while Nossis's poetry exhibits 'a keen appreciation of feminine beauty and grace', it is not explicitly homoerotic.² Nowhere in her work do we see the same suggestion of sexual activity between women as in Sappho Fragment 94, for example. Still, Nossis's epigrams express deep and arguably erotically charged admiration for the bodily beauty, tempers, and talents of women like Polyarchis, Samytha, Kallo, Thaumareta, Melinna, and Sabaithis (4-9 GP), and men are absent from her poetic world. Some have speculated as to whether Nossis may have composed more explicit amatory poetry, which would have been included in Meleager's anthology (the *Garland*, circa 90 BCE) but has been lost to us. Skinner argues that the 'close poetic identification with women' manifest in Nossis's extant corpus can be used as evidence for 'the probable homoerotic bent' of these missing epigrams.³

¹ Hubbard (2003) p. 289 n. 47.

² Hubbard (2003) p. 270.

³ Skinner (1989 p. 7)

The eight epigrams that I have selected and translated in this issue fall into three categories. 11 GP and 1 GP are programmatic poems, outlining Nossis's Sapphic project and bearing her *sphragis*, her signature. 4 GP and 5 GP are dedicatory epigrams, further invoking the goddess Aphrodite and admiring the splendid offerings women in Nossis's milieu present to her. 6–9 GP are portrait epigrams, describing beautiful painted images of Nossis's companions and commenting on both the portraits' mimetic excellence and the excellence of the women depicted.

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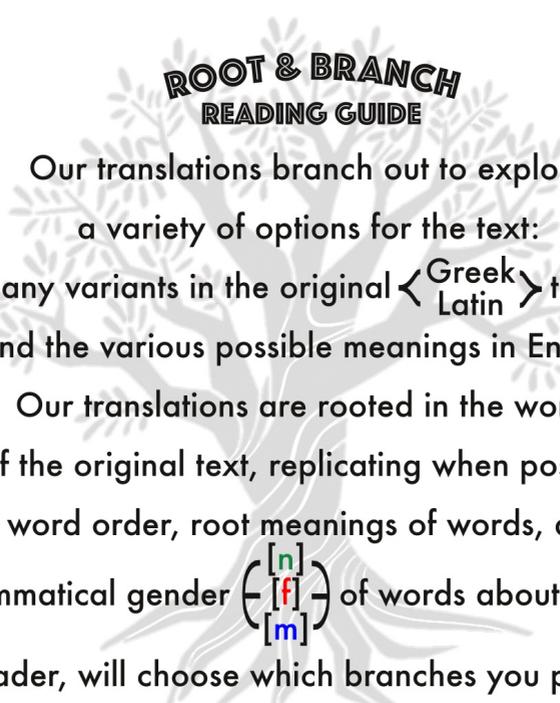
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ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore
a variety of options for the text:
any variants in the original < Greek / Latin > texts
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words
of the original text, replicating when possible
word order, root meanings of words, and
grammatical gender ($\left(\begin{array}{c} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{array} \right)$) of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

THE NOSSIS TEXTS READING GUIDE

Textual variations, in all poems, have been marked when they
alter the syntax of the poem or when they are felt significant to
the meaning or style of the poem. The sources are colour-coded:

black = the same in both editions (Page 1975 & Paton 1916)

purple = Page's *Epigrammata Graeca* (1975 OCT)

blue = Paton's *Anthologia Graeca* (1916 Loeb)

green = the original manuscript from the *Anthologia Palatina* (P)

11 GP / AP 7.718 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΟΣ

ο (stranger / foreigner / guest), if you ever sail to (beautiful / fine) (dancing / placed) Mitylene,

{ to (call upon / summon) the flower of Sappho's graces,
which (calls forth / summons) Sappho, the flower of the graces, }

say that { one (loved / kissed) [f] by the Muses and by her – the Lokrian earth
a Lokrian woman (loved / kissed) by the Muses [...]
one (loved / kissed) [f] by the Muses – the Lokrian earth }

bore – me: and knowing that my name is Nossis,
bore, and knowing that my name is Nossis,
bore (like / equal to) her, and that her name is Nossis. } go!



ὦ ξεῖν', εἰ τύ γε πλείς ποτὶ καλλίχορον Μιτυλήναν,

τᾶν (Σαπφοῦς / Σαπφῶ) χαρίτων ἄνθος (ἐναυσόμενος / ἐναυσαμέναν),

εἰπεῖν ὡς Μούσαισι { φίλαν τήνq τε Λοκρὶς γᾶ
φίλα τήνq αἶτε Λόκρισσα
φίλαν τήνq τε Λοκρὶς γᾶ }

τίκτε μ'· ἴσαις δ' ὅτι μοι
τίκτειν ἴσαις δ' ὅτι μοι } τοῦνομα Νοσσίς, ἴθι.
τίκτεν ἴσαν ὅτι θ' οἱ

NOTES

11.1 *beautiful/fine-dancing/placed*: καλλιχορον can be defined as ‘lovely with respect to places’ or ‘lovely with respect to dances’. The *LSJ* translates the adjective as ‘with fair dancing-grounds’, a popular epithet used for cities (*Odyssey* 11.581, *Homeric Hymn* 15.2, *Pindar Pythian* 12.26).

11.1 *Μιτυλήναν*: Mytilene is, notably, a city on the island of Lesbos and the birthplace and home of the archaic lyric poet Sappho, whom Nossis evokes in the subsequent line. The Greek spelling here, as printed in Page (1975), is perhaps a corruption of the more common Μυτιλήνη.

11.2 *έναυσόμενος/έναυσαμέναν*; *call upon/forth / summon*: Rayor (1991 p. 192) translates the verb as ‘to catch fire’ and claims that the assumption made in this poem is that ‘one goes to Mitylene to be inspired by Sappho’s poetry, as Nossis clearly was’.

11.3 *loved/kissed*: for the translation of φίλαν as ‘kissed’, I credit Rayor’s translation of ἐφίλασεν / ἐφίλησεν as ‘kissed’ in Nossis 1 GP (1991 p. 133) and I also rely on entry A.4 for φιλέω in the *LSJ*, which indicates that the verb can be rendered as ‘show outward signs of love, esp. kiss’.

11.3–4 The version of the original manuscript (in green) is ungrammatical here, and cannot be fully translated, but I give it anyway, alongside scholars’ suggestions for grammatical versions.

1 GP / AP 5.170 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΟΣ

nothing is \langle pleasanter
sweeter \rangle than love: those things that are \langle happy
blessed \rangle ,
all of them are
second: from [my] mouth I have spat even honey.

this says Nossis: whomever Kypris has not $\left(\begin{array}{c} \text{felt affection for} \\ \text{loved} \\ \text{kissed} \end{array} \right)$,
does not know those flowers, what sort of roses.



ἄδιον οὐδὲν ἔρωτος· \langle ἄ δ' \rangle
τάδ' ὄλβια, δεύτερα πάντα
ἐστίν· ἀπὸ στόματος δ' ἔπυσα καὶ τὸ μέλι.

τοῦτο λέγει Νοσσίς· τίνα δ' ἂ Κύπρις οὐκ \langle ἐφίλασεν
ἐφίλησεν \rangle ,
οὐκ οἶδεν \langle τήνας τάνθεα
κήνατάνθεα \rangle , ποῖα ρόδα.

NOTES

- The *Anthologia Graeca* prefaces this epigram with the subheading εἰς ἔρωτα ('on love').

1.1 *nothing is pleasanter/sweeter than love*: Skinner (2000) argues that this line, coupled with the reference to τὸ μέλι, 'honey', in the next, is an allusion to Sappho's declaration that 'desire is paradoxically sweet and bitter (*glukypikros*)'. See Sappho Fragment 130 (Voigt): Ἔρος δηῦτέ μ' ὀ λυσιμέλης δόνει, γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον, 'love/Eros yet again – the limb-loosening – shakes me, sweet-bitter unmanageable/helpless beast/reptile/creepy-crawly' (Barker, *LESBIANTIQUITY* 3). However it's worth noting that Nossis uses ἄδιον, which, unlike Sappho's γλυκύ-, does not directly connote sweetness.

1.1–2 *nothing is pleasanter/sweeter than love ... even honey*: Skinner (1989) argues that this may be a reference to a particular kind of poetry: "'honey" song could refer to Pindaric praise-song, and "love" song to Sappho's poetry' (cited in Rayor 1991 p. 192).

1.4 *what sort of roses*: Rayor (1991 p. 192) claims that the roses are 'a symbol of both the Muses' poetic gift and of Aphrodite's sexuality'. Aphrodite's affection, favor, or 'kiss' is thus erotic and poetic, inciting inspiration and understanding. Skinner (2000) notes that the 'roses' as a metaphor for poetry are explicitly Sapphic in nature.

- While the Greek for this epigram does contain textual variants, these do not affect my English translation of the poem.

4 GP / AP 9.332 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΔΟΣ [ΛΕΣΒΙΑΣ]

< when we [f] go to the temple let us
let us go to the temple to > see Aphrodite's
wooden statue, how < finely
skilfully > it is rendered with gold.
Polyarchis dedicated it, having reaped so much
success from her own body's < splendor
glory > .



< ἔλθοῖσαι
ἔλθοιμεν > ποτὶ ναὸν ἰδῶμεθα τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας
τὸ βρέτας ὡς χρυσῶ δαιδαλόεν τελέθει.
εἴσατό μιν Πολυαρχίς ἐπαυρομένα μάλα πολλὰν
κτῆσιν ἀπ' οἰκείου σώματος ἀγλαΐας.

NOTES

- [ΛΕΣΒΙΑΣ], '[THE LESBIAN]', is added to the usual heading ΝΟΣΣΙΔΟΣ, 'NOSSIS'S', of AP 9.332. This addition does not mean that the anthologizer thought Nossis was from Lesbos (or that she was a lesbian in the modern sense), but signifies the connection between Nossis and Sappho, the pre-eminent female poet of Lesbos, whom Nossis claims as her precursor, as we saw in 11 and 1 GP.

4.1 *when we [f] go*: Skinner (2000) argues that the feminine participle ἐλθοῖσαι invites the reader into the circle of women surrounding the speaker of this epigram to discover the splendor of Polyarchis's statue.

4.1-2 *Aphrodite's wooden statue*: Skinner (2000) notes that it would be customary for girls at Locri to dedicate robes and other garments to goddesses like Aphrodite and Persephone before they were married. Another epigram by Nossis, GP 3 / AP 6.265 describes Nossis dedicating a linen robe to Hera.

4.3-4 Rayor (1991 p. 192) claims that Polyarchis was a prostitute who was able to 'dedicate a statue of Aphrodite from her earnings'. Skinner (2000) speculates that Polyarchis herself may have posed for the statue, perhaps in the nude (as Aphrodite was traditionally depicted).

5 GP / AP 6.275 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΟΣ

rejoicing, <[I truly tell] you>, it seems that Aphrodite took
<from the hair this net
this hairnet>, a dedication from Samytha:
for it is <finely
skilfully> made and smells of some pleasant nectar:
with which she too beautiful Adonis anoints.



χαίροισάν τοι ἔοικε κομᾶν ἄπο τὰν Ἄφροδίταν
ἄνθεμα κεκρύφαλον τόνδε λαβεῖν Σαμύθας·
δαιδάλεός τε γάρ ἐστι καὶ ἀδύ τι νέκταρος ὄσδει·
<τούτῳ
τοῦ, τῷ> καὶ τήνα καλὸν Ἄδωνα χρίει.

NOTES

5.2 *Samytha*: a person (female), not a place, as indicated in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*.

5.4 *she too*: καὶ τήνα is ambiguous, and could refer to either Aphrodite or Samytha. The line could therefore show Aphrodite anointing her young lover Adonis, or Samytha anointing some kind of icon of Adonis. Translators take different approaches to the line. Paton (1916 p. 447) leaves it ambiguous: ‘that nectar with which she, too, anoints lovely Adonis’; whereas Rayor (1991 p. 134) takes τήνα as referring to Aphrodite: ‘with which the goddess too anoints fair Adonis’. Rayor (p. 193) bases her decision on the fact that after Adonis was killed, Aphrodite ‘preserved his body with a nectar salve’.

- While the Greek for this epigram does contain a textual variant, it does not affect my English translation of the poem.

6 GP / AP 9.605 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΔΟΣ

her portrait, in blonde Aphrodite's house, Kallio

dedicated, the image painted in every way $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{like} \\ \text{equal to} \end{array} \right\rangle$ her.

how gently she stands: look, her $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{grace} \\ \text{charm} \end{array} \right\rangle$ as $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{greatly} \\ \text{youthfully} \end{array} \right\rangle$ blossoms.

may she rejoice, for she does not have any complaint $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{in} \\ \text{of} \end{array} \right\rangle$ life.



τὸν πίνακα ξανθᾶς Καλλῶ δόμον εἰς Ἄφροδίτας

εἰκόνα γραψαμένα πάντ' ἀνέθηκεν ἴσαν.

ὡς ἀγανῶς ἔστακεν· ἴδ' ἂ χάρις ἀλίκον ἀνθεῖ.

χαιρέτω, οὐ τίνα γὰρ μέμψιν ἔχει βιοτᾶς.

NOTES

6–9 GP are all taken to be descriptions of women's portraits – probably wall-paintings, as Hubbard (2003 p. 288) argues. In these poems, we see the 'keen appreciation of feminine beauty and grace' that Hubbard (p. 269) notes in his discussion of Nossis, particularly through the evocative language used to describe women's beautiful forms, their gentle faces, and lovely mild gazes.

7 GP / AP 9.604 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΔΟΣ

Thaumareta's < ^{form}appearance > this portrait has: for well the pride
it renders and the ripeness of her, gentle-eyed.

even she would fawn on you if she saw, your house-guard puppy,
believing that she looks at the mistress of her < ^{roof}halls >.



Θαυμαρέτας μορφὰν ὁ πίναξ ἔχει· εὐ̂ γε τὸ γαῦρον

τεύξε τό θ' ὠραῖον τᾶς ἀγανοβλεφάρου.

σαῖνοι κέν σ' < ^{ἔσιδοῖσα}ἔσιδοῦσα > καὶ οἰκοφύλαξ σκυλάκαινα,

δέσποιναν μελάθρων οἰομένα ποθορῆν.

NOTES

7.1 *pride*: I have translated the adjectival noun τὸ γαῦρον, from the verb γαυριάω, 'to bear oneself proudly' or 'to pride oneself' (LSJ), as 'pride', since the more severe renderings of 'hauteur' or 'disdain' seem overly negative for an epigram that is decidedly complimentary, if unusual in its choice of descriptors.

7.2 *ripeness*: I have translated this second adjectival noun, τό ώραῖον, as 'ripeness', since it reflects the quality of being 'in season' or in the prime of life suggested by the word's relation to ἡ ὥρα, 'season' or 'springtime'.

7.4 *roof/halls*: μελάθρον is more literally a 'roof beam', typically made of wood, but in the plural and through synecdoche it is also commonly taken to mean 'house' or 'halls'.

- While the Greek for this epigram does contain a textual variant, it does not affect my English translation of the poem.

8 GP / AP 6.353 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΟΣ

Melinnaherself has been rendered: see how gentle is her face.

at me she seems to look $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{mildly} \\ \text{sweetly} \end{array} \right\rangle$:

how truly the daughter resembles the mother in every way.

surely it's $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{beautiful} \\ \text{fine} \end{array} \right\rangle$ whenever children are $\left\langle \begin{array}{c} \text{like} \\ \text{equal to} \end{array} \right\rangle$ their parents.



αὐτομέλινα τέτυκται· ἴδ' ὡς ἀγανὸν τὸ πρόσωπον.

ἀμὲ ποτοπάζειν μειλιχίως δοκέει·

ὡς ἐτύμως θυγάτηρ τῆ ματέρι πάντα ποτώκει.

ἦ καλὸν ὄκκα πέλη τέκνα γονεῦσιν ἴσα.

NOTES

8.1 *Melinnaherself*: I have tried to capture in translation the way the Greek text combines Melinna's name with the pronoun αὐτο.

8.3 *ποτώκει*; resembles: literally, 'neighbours' or 'lives near', with the root *oikos*, 'household'.

9 GP / AP 6.354 – ΝΟΣΣΙΑΟΣ

known even from < afar
there > to be of Sabaithis is
this likeness from its < form
appearance > and magnificence.
observe: her prudence and < mildness
sweetness > right here
I hope to see. < may you rejoice
farewell > greatly, blessed woman.



γνωτὰ καὶ < τηλῶθε
τηνῶθε > Σαβαιθίδος εἶδεται ἔμμεν
ἄδ' εἰκῶν μορφῆ καὶ < μεγαλειοσύνη
μεγαλωσύνη >.
θάεο· τὰν πινυτὰν τό δὲ μείλιχον αὐτόθι τήνας
ἔλπομ' ὀρήν. χαίροις πολλά, μάκαιρα γύναι.

NOTES

9.1 *Sabaithis*: a person (female), not a place, as indicated in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*.



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