Chrysogone's Mother

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An inscribed epigram of the late fourth century B.C., found at Cnidos by Newton and now in the British Museum, offers a dedication to Kore and Demeter:

Κορέι και Δήμητρι άιδαν και άγαλμα νέφελαν
Χρυσογόνη μήτηρ, Πυραμόστατος δέ άλοχος,
Χρυσίνθη, έννευταν ὃνδιοι ίδιον
Ερήμη γών την ἄτρωμα θείας ΤΑΘΗΝΗν προσελεύει.

To Kore and Demeter the house and statue were dedicated by Chrysogone's mother, Hippocrates' wife, Chrysina, who saw a holy vision at night: for Hermes told her to be an attendant to the goddessess...

So the poem has been understood, from its earliest rendering to the most recent volume. The difficulty is in the fourth line. Newton and all who capitalize the meaningless letters despair of emendation and take Tathne as a proper name, some location in the vicinity of Cnidos. Or: δικός νεφέλας Burrian, "wearing laurel" (which plant seems inappropriate); τὸ θεόν η Κελλ, "as to sacrifices" (which seems otiose); τὸ θεόν η Κελλ, "serve with a ruler" by building the temple (but the present definitive suggests not an action but a permanent condition, "to be a servant to ... "). This doxography is in Kaibel (1891). Our age is wary of emendation, and the recent editors have been content to cite Kaibel's idea but to print Tathne, as a toponym.

Whatever the word, it must fit the larger context. What was the dedicant's situation? Her experience and gesture have been taken to signal "vocation"; the gods have called her to the priesthood. That is a familiar and normal feature of the Christian religion, and shared by other mystery cults of the Roman pe-

1 Now Blumel, LK nit 131 (Kaibel 785; CEG II 890; Merkelbach-Stauber, Steinepfr. gr. Aus. 1 01/01/01); G. Bean/P. M. Fraser, BSA 47 (1952) 207 with pl. 41.1, give a photograph of a sanctuary.

2 As Blumel notes (involving Latomareta II.2. no. 17), probably some little shrine rather than the temple building; perhaps this was for the statue itself. For the range of the word see M.-C. Hellmann, Recherches sur le vocabulaire de l'architecte grecque (Paris 1972) 298-301.

3 C. T. Newton described the find (at a temple, with fragments of statues of Peryphone and Deme- ter and some of the famous cursive tablets) in Travels and Discoveries in the Levant I (London 1865) 176-177: "this dedication was made in obedience to the god Hermes, who, appearing in a dream, declared to Chrysina that she should be the priestess of these goddesses at a place called Tathne." Merkelbach-Stauber: "Denn Hermes hat die Weisung gegeben, den Göttinnen in dem Ort Tathne Dienst zu leisten."

4 In some cases a required feature, to be testified to at ordination. From the Book of Common Prayer, Rule of Ordination: "Do you think in your heart, that you are truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and according to the Canons of this Church, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?" "I think it."

5 For the transformation of the cult of Asclepius at Athens see K. Clinton, "The Epidaurus and the Arrival of Asclepius in Athens", in R. Hög (ed.), Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence (Stockholm 1994) 17-34.
rarely means to "tell" in the sense of "order," and that it should take the dative, while the accusative is "very remarkable". They suggest that the aorist of ἐφημον was intended, and ascribe ἐφημον to a mason's error or some local dialectic variant. ἐφημον sometimes can mean to "tell" someone to do something; but by far its more common use is to "say" that something is so, with accusative and indirect discourse - ὡς regularly informs rather than commands. With the accusative it can mean nothing else. We have ἔφημον; take the expression in its normal sense: "For Hermes said that she is an attendant ..."). She", the referent of ἔφημον and subject of this revelation, will not be Chrysyna, who does not need to be told what she is or does; it must be her daughter. This confirms the hint of the second line: Crysonogone is dead.

For why is Hermes the source of the mother’s vision about service to the goddess? Who better than Hermes Conductor of Souls to be able to inform the living about the fate of the dead? So a poem from Naples requests information about the deceased from Hermes messenger of Persephone: ἠγγέλει Φερσοσόνως, Ἐνεκή, τίνα τιν αποκαλεῖ; εἰς τὸν ἀνθρώπον Θάνατον ἀνέπεσο (IG XIV 760; Kaelbel 575). If this is right, then Chrysonogone’s vision was not about this world and her duty in it, but about the afterlife and the fate of her daughter. Hermes gave her what the liturgy called “comfortable words” about Chrysonogone: she is now an attendant of the goddesses. προσωπεῖα - for Persephone had her retinue of favorites. The first so chosen, it was known, had been Hecate: πολλαὶ δ' ἐν' ἀμφατορίᾳ κόρην Ἀδμήτους ζήνην ἐκ τοῦ οὐ προσώποις καὶ ἀνάμοιον ἔπελξεν (Hom. Hymn. Dem. 439-440). It is unusual for Kore (in line 1) to be named first. The base held a single statue, presumably of Kore 1. Some might expect the duel for the 'Twain in line 4 (e.g. IG II 4588); but that is a pedantry. The problem is not so much grammatical as theological: what we do not expect is for Demeter and Kore to be permanently together in the underworld or anywhere. Read therefore théa, Kore alone, queen of the dead, invoked first and last in the poem. This leaves us ΣΤΑΘΝΗ. We should not now seek in these letters some place in the territory of Cnidus, if this was a part of Chrysona’s vision of the realm of the dead. No one has thought that the letters can be Greek, so they must involve a mason’s error and emendation. What is missing is some specification of the goddess; and the letters have the look of the right sort of adjective. We might then consider emending to θεᾶσα ὑσσυρή, an appropriate description of a divinity whom one serves. In Roman Alexandria we find, invoking the rulers of the underworld, θεᾶς τῆς Φερσοσόνος, Δίμητρος κόρη (Bemand, L. mith. Eng. 43.6); or Syros, κόρης τοῦ Ιησοῦ τοῦ Ἀργοκόρος (IG XII.5 655). If this alteration is granted, then: “For Hermes said that she is an attendant to the <dread> goddess.” But leave the word as a speculation; it does not affect our understanding of the whole.

The theme then is not vocation but thanksgiving: the poem articulates a story where a thousand other dedications summarize with the word ὑσσυρή. The child Chrysonogone is dead. In her grief, her mother, the child who was named, has had a dream. Hermes gave her not a command but a comforting revelation. What more long-lived for a bereaved parent? The lamented girl is in fact now a favorite of the gods. It is a timeless hope. So begins a poem for a girl who (one assumes) drowned in the Nile (II A.D.F.):

οὐσία σοι μέλλει δύναν, θυγατέρι, μετὰ χάλκιθρόμου, ἔξορο θήραν, θεὸς ἀείθημον, μοῆμεν ἔνθισαμεν τε χάρισμα Μύθοιο, ἤ νύμφη σοῦ Ἀργοκορῆς γένεσαν. χαίρε, τέφος Ἔναμὴ ὑσσυρή σου (σκλ.)
No longer will I sacrifice to you with lamentations, daughter, now that I have learned that you turned into a god. With libations and prayers bless Isidora, who, a girl (nympha), has become a prize of the Nymphs. Hal child, you name you Nympha ...

(He does not say how he learned this.) Some such comfort did the dead Creusa, speaking for herself, hint to Aeneas (Aen. 2.788): “The great Mother of the Gods keeps me on these shores.” Her naming the divinity with such precision and confidence has led many readers to deduce that in death Creusa was made an honored servant of the goddess. A Christian consolation of long standing would make a special angel of a deceased child. Ben Jonson on his daughter (1593) 11:

In epigrams: Anth. Gr. 2.1.263; 5.8.5; 5.177.6; 5.186.4; 5.266.2; 6.147.4; 6.149.1; 7.120.2; 7.211.1; 7.545.1; 9.122.2; 9.906.1; 9.929.2; 10.49.1; 10.52.1; 11.139.2; 11.154.4; 11.166.1; 12.165.4; Pegler 155.2; 184.2; Plat. Theaon, I.1; Isid PZ 1.92.3; I. Perp. VIII 3.129.2; Roberti, I. aqon. gr. 21.11; JG UrbRom IV 1532.13-15. "Order": Anth. Gr. 12.32.7 γράφει ἕναν ἵππον μονακό, "for he says only look." Image of information given in a dream vision: Ael. Arist. 48.26 Keil.

7 Bean and Frazer consider a statue of Chrysonogone as possible instead. That would be surprising at this early date. In IG X.2.3 178 the kin dedicate an image of a dead girl to Aphrodite, "for the Cytherene wanted her to be her temple sharer"; but this was half a millennium later than Chrysyna’s dedication.

8 For a mother choosing the name of her daughter we have the word of Demeter herself, Hymn. Hom. Dem. 122.


10 Conington (1805), "evidently ... one of her attendants ... a half-dullified state"; A. G. Austin (1964) 284, "preeminently, Cybele’s priestess" (but the dead cannot be priest).

Here lies to each her parents ruth,
MARY, the daughter of their youth:
Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due,
It makes the father, lesse, to rue.
At sixe moneths end, shee parted hence
With saftie of her innocence;
Whose soule heavens Queene, (whose name shee beares)
In comfort of her mothers teares,
Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-traine ... 

The subject of Chrysina’s poem throughout, its occasion, is Chrysogone. Hermes has revealed that now she is a chosen attendant of Kore, and to that daughter and her mother Chrysina makes her thank-offering. The circle of the poem is closed, and the logic of Chrysina’s gesture complete: she honors Kore first as is fitting, but not alone, for she adds Demeter – whose loss, grief, consolation, and honor Chrysina understands. She is Chrysogone’s mother.

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