CHAPTER FIVE

A TABLET IN IMPERIAL ROME (L 11)

Translation of tablet 11 from Rome

At first glance, the tablet found at Rome is rather similar to the ones from Thurii, which we have just seen. It begins with an almost identical formula, referring to the fact that the soul comes pure from among the pure, and with an invocation to the subterranean Queen, to Eucles and to Eubouleus, and the deceased woman is told that she will be transformed into a goddess. However, as we shall see, it presents some significant differences.


She comes from among the pure, pure, queen of the subterranean beings,
Eucles and Eubouleus, son of Zeus. Accept, therefore, this gift of Mnemosyne, celebrated by men.
“Come, Caecilia Secundina, legitimately transformed into a goddess”.

Commentaries

5.1. Change of person in the sacred formula

It is curious to find in Rome, almost six centuries after the tablets from Thurii, a text as similar to them as this one. However, these six centuries have not passed in vain, and we find differences between the texts that are significant. In the first place, the initial formula has changed. In contrast to the “I come” declared by the soul itself in the tablets from Thurii, here we find “comes”. The speaker is not, therefore, the dead woman, but a third person. It could be a guardian
of the infernal regions,¹ or else an “intermediary from this world”, or else the tablet itself.²

Whoever he may be, the speaker himself requests in the imperative mode that the gods invoked accept a gift from Mnemosyne. The translation we offer is based on the conjecture ἀλλὰ δέξεσθε,³ which enables the text to be understood with a certain clarity: Eubouleus, son of Zeus, is none other than Dionysus, who is likewise a son of Persephone,⁴ and Eucles is Zeus, identified with the infernal god.

Curiously in a tablet containing the formula of presentation before Persephone, such as those from Thurii, we find a mention of Mnemosyne in what follows, such as in those from the first group we examined, which constitutes a proof that at least at this time—and we believe it was always that way—Mnemosyne and Persephone belonged to one and the same religious scheme.

We can then ask ourselves what the poet is referring to when he speaks of “this gift of Mnemosyne”. Some authors believe it is the poem,⁵ but

¹ As suggested by Zuntz (1971) 334.
² As in the proposal of Riedweg (1996) 479.
³ Suggested by West (1975) 231, in opposition to that of Diels (1907) 46 f. ἀγλαά, ἔχω δὲ. If we were to accept Diels’ conjecture, the translation would be “splendid offspring of Zeus. I have this gift from Mnemosyne, etc.” Yet this text (accepted by the majority of modern editors) seems unacceptable to us, for several reasons: a) to whom does “splendid offspring of Zeus” refer—as Kotansky wonders (1994) 110—, since it cannot be Caecilia Secundina herself, as Marshall (1911) 380 would have it. b) Who is the subject of “I have”? Not much is solved by the suggestion by Colli (1981) 236 f. who punctuates after τέχος and interprets as “splendid (viz. I, the soul), I have…”.
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We would expect ἔχω.

⁴ Cf. Orph. Hymn. 30, 1 ff.: “I invoke Dionysus… (6) Eubouleus, engendered by Zeus and Persephone”, or 29, 6: “queen of the subterranean beings, whom Zeus engendered as his daughter, the mother of Eubouleus”.
⁵ Zuntz (1971) 335, with the approval of Kotansky (1994) 112. Still less probably, fresh water, as Marshall (1911) 379 would have it. For her part, Tortorelli Ghidini (1995b) 478 f. considers it a “metaphorical” usage.