

AN EPIGRAM FOR AN EMPEROR

A.P. 9, 349:

Ὑδατά σοι Κοτίλεια γενέθλιον ἡμᾶρ ὀραῶντι,
Καῖσαρ, ἐπιβλύζοι σωρὸν ἀκεσφορίας,
ὄφρα σε κόσμος ἅπας πάππον . . . αὐγάζηται,
ὥς πατέρα τρισσῆς εἶσιδεν εὐτοκίης.

Translation by W.R. Paton (*The Greek Anthology*, Loeb edition, vol. 3, page 189):

“Caesar, may the baths of Cutiliae on this thy birthday gush for thee in abundance of healing, so that all the world may see thee a grandfather as it has seen thee the father of three fair children.”

Page noted¹ that according to the *lemma* this epigram was written for Nero. However, Page argued that the identification of “Caesar” depends on the second couplet, which seems to mean that “Caesar” had three children. In conclusion, Page argued that most likely Vespasian is addressed in the epigram.

I would like to point out that it is perfectly possible for us to accept the statement of the *lemma*. The poet states that the world has seen Caesar (i.e. Nero) as the “father of a threefold happy delivery” (πατέρα τρισσῆς ... εὐτοκίης). The poet is alluding to the child which was born to Nero and Poppaea. The birth was felicitous from a treble point of view. The mother and child are doing well, and the father is happy, to put it with Cicero, who writes (cf. *Thes. Gr. Ling.*, s.v. εὐτοκέω) “quod hūτόκησεν gaudeo” (*Ad Att.* X, 18, 1).

The adjective γενέθλιος, when referred to ἡμᾶρ, ἡώς or ἡριγένεια (*A.P.* 6, 261, 3; 6, 345, 3; 9, 353, 3) denotes an “anniversary”, Sp. “cumpleaños”; here Leonides, who not seldom seeks the “bold”, the “abnormal”, and the “unique” (cf. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 517), has used the adjective in its attested, but rare, etymological meaning, i.e., “day on which the birth has occurred”, cf. Ammonius 35, as quoted in *Thes.*, s.v. γενέθλιος. Using words in their etymological meaning was, of course, an epigrammatic feature, cf. G. Giangrande, *Scr. Min. Alex.* III, p. 165f.

Accordingly, the birthday mentioned in line 1 is that of the child which was born to Nero and Poppaea. The child died a few months later.

Leonides of Alexandria mentions Nero’s wife Poppaea at *A.P.* 9, 355:

Οὐράνιον μίμημα γενεθλιακαῖσιν ἐν ὥραις
τοῦτ’ ἀπὸ Νειλογενοῦς δέξο Λεωνίδεω,
Ποππαία, Διὸς εἶνι, Σεβαστιάς· εὐαδε γάρ σοι
δῶρα τὰ καὶ λέκτρων ἄξια καὶ σοφίης.

¹ Cf. *Further Greek Epigrams*, Cambridge 1981, page 531.

Translation by Paton (*op. cit.*, page 191):

“Poppaea Augusta, spouse of Zeus, receive from the Egyptian Leonidas this map of the heavens on thy natal day; for thou takest pleasure in gifts worthy of thy alliance and thy learning.”

I would like to point out that the birthday mentioned in line 1 may be that of the child which she is known to have had with Nero.

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