

= Philitas of Cos =

Philitas of Cos (/ f??la?t?s / ; Greek : ??????? , Phil?tas ; c . 340 ? c . 285 BC) , sometimes spelled Philetas (/ fa??li?t?s / ; ??????? , Phil?tas ; see Bibliography below) , was a scholar and poet during the early Hellenistic period of ancient Greece . A Greek associated with Alexandria , he flourished in the second half of the 4th century BC and was appointed tutor to the heir to the throne of Ptolemaic Egypt . He was thin and frail ; Athenaeus later caricatured him as an academic so consumed by his studies that he wasted away and died .

Philitas was the first major Greek writer who was both a scholar and a poet . His reputation continued for centuries , based on both his pioneering study of words and his verse in elegiac meter . His vocabulary Disorderly Words described the meanings of rare literary words , including those used by Homer . His poetry , notably his elegiac poem Demeter , was highly respected by later ancient poets . However , almost all his work has since been lost .

= = Life = =

Little is known of Philitas ' life . Ancient sources refer to him as a Coan , a native or long @-@ time inhabitant of Cos , one of the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea just off the coast of Asia . His student Theocritus wrote that Philetas ' father was Telephos (??????? , T?lephos) and his mother , assuming the manuscript is supplemented correctly , Euctione (??????? , Euktión?) . From a comment about Philitas in the Suda , a 10th @-@ century AD historical encyclopedia , it is estimated he was born c . 340 BC , and that he might have established a reputation in Cos by c . 309 / 8 BC . During the Wars of the Diadochi that followed the death of Alexander the Great and divided Alexander 's empire , Ptolemy had captured Cos from his rival successor , Antigonus , in 310 BC ; his son , Ptolemy II Philadelphus , was born there in 308 BC . It was a favorite retreat for men of letters weary of Alexandria .

Philetas was appointed Philadelphus ' tutor , which suggests he moved to Alexandria c . 297 / 6 BC and moved back to Cos in the later 290s BC . He may also have tutored Arsinoe II , Philadelphus ' older sister and eventual wife . Later tutors of royal offspring in Ptolemaic Egypt generally headed the Library of Alexandria , but it is unknown whether Philitas held that position . Philitas also taught the poets Hermesianax and Theocritus and the grammarian Zenodotus , and after he returned to Cos he seems to have spent at least ten years leading a brotherhood of intellectuals and poets that included Aratus , Hermesianax , and Theocritus .

Hermesianax wrote of " Philitas , singing of nimble Bittis " , and Ovid twice calls her " Battis " . It is commonly thought that Bittis or Battis was Philitas ' mistress , and that Hermesianax referred to love poetry ; another possibility is that her name connoted " chatterbox " , and that she was a humorous personification of Philitas ' passion for words .

Philitas was thin and frail , and may have suffered and died from a wasting disease . He seems to have died in Cos sometime in the 280s BC . His pupil Hermesianax wrote that a statue of him was erected under a plane tree by the people of Cos , depicting him as " frail with all the glosses " . His contemporary Posidippus wrote that Philadelphus commissioned a bronze of Philitas in old age from the sculptor Hecataeus , which " included nothing from the physique of heroes . No , ... he cast the old man full of cares . " The 3rd century AD Roman author Aelian skeptically passed along a story that Philitas was so thin that he put lead weights in the soles of his shoes to avoid being blown away by a stiff wind . A 2nd century AD Greek author , Athenaeus of Naucratis , wrote that Philitas studied false arguments and erroneous word @-@ usage so intensely that he wasted away and starved to death , and that his epitaph read :

St. George Stock analyzed the story as saying Philitas studied the Megarian school of philosophy , which cultivated and studied paradoxes such as the liar paradox : if someone says " I am lying " , is what he says true or false ? Stock wrote that Philitas worried so much over the liar paradox that he died of insomnia , and translated the epitaph as follows :

A more literal translation suggests that the invented epitaph pokes fun at Philitas ' focus on using the right words :

= = Works = =

Philaitas wrote a vocabulary explaining the meanings of rare literary words , words from local dialects , and technical terms ; it probably took the form of a lexicon . The vocabulary , called Disorderly Words (??????? ??????? , Átaktoi glôssai) , has been lost , with only a few fragments quoted by later authors . One example , quoted in Athenaeus , is that the word ????? (pélla) meant " wine cup " in the ancient Greek region of Boeotia ; this was evidently contrasted to the same word meaning " milk pail " in Homer 's Iliad . Hermeneia , another scholarly work , probably contained Philaitas ' versions and critical interpretations of Homer and other authors .

About thirty fragments of Philaitas ' poetry are known , along with four definite titles :

Demeter , Philaitas ' most famous work , consisted of elegiac couplets , or couplets in the elegiac meter . Its few surviving fragments suggest that it narrated the grain goddess Demeter 's hunt for her daughter Persephone . The fragments describe Demeter 's arrival on Cos and warm welcome by its royal family of Meropids , or humans twice normal size , thus presenting the founding myth of a local cult of Demeter on Cos .

Hermes was an epyllion , or brief mythological narrative , written in hexameter . It had the structure of a hymn , with a central narrative telling of Odysseus ' visit to the island of the king Aeolus , keeper of the winds , and of Odysseus ' secret affair with the king 's daughter Polymele . It is also possible that Hermes was a collection of such stories , with the patronage of Hermes himself as the common thread .

Playthings (??????? , Paígnia) had two shorter collections . These poems had the structure of epigrams and their themes may have included erotica . The only surviving poem contains two elegiac couplets and has a puzzle or riddle structure characteristic of some ancient Greek drinking @-@ party songs .

Only one of the Epigrams has been fully reconstructed .

Another possible poem is Telephus , which may have been a companion to Demeter .

At most fifty verses of Philaitas survive . Below is an example fragment of two verses , which was quoted in the Collection of Paradoxical Stories , whose putative author Antigonos (often identified with Antigonos of Carystus , a near @-@ contemporary) does not specify which work they came from ; indirect evidence suggests Demeter . These two verses show the confluence of Philaitas ' interests in poetry and obscure words :

According to Antigonos , the " cactus " (?????? , káktos) was a thorny plant from Sicily , and " When a deer steps on it and is pricked , its bones remain soundless and unusable for flutes . For that reason Philaitas spoke of it . " Antigonos quotes one more passage , and the 5th century AD anthologist Stobaeus quotes eleven passages from Philaitas ; the remaining fragments are derived from ancient commentators who quoted Philaitas when discussing rare words or names used by other authors .

= = Influence = =

Philaitas was the most important intellectual figure in the early years of Hellenistic civilization . He gained instant recognition in both poetry and literary scholarship , and , as far as is known , was the first person called " poet as well as scholar " (??????? ??? ??? ????????? , poi?t?s [h] áma kai kritikós) . As tutor to Philadelphus he is assumed to have had great influence on the development of the Mouseion at Alexandria , a scholarly institution that included the famous Library of Alexandria . A statue was erected of him , possibly at a Mouseion at Cos , and his work was explicitly acknowledged as a classic by both Theocritus and Callimachus .

His reputation for scholarship endured for at least a century . In Athens , the comic playwright Strato made jokes that assumed audiences knew about Philaitas ' vocabulary , and the vocabulary was criticized more than a century later by the influential Homeric scholar Aristarchus of Samothrace in his Against Philaitas (????? ????????? , Pròs Philáitan) . The geographer Strabo described him three centuries later as " simultaneously a poet and a critic " .

Philitas was the first writer whose works represent the combination of qualities now regarded as Hellenistic : variety , scholarship , and use of Homeric sources in non @-@ epic works . He directly influenced the major Hellenistic poets Callimachus and Apollonius of Rhodes . His poetry was mentioned or briefly quoted by Callimachus and by other ancient authors , and his poetic reputation endured for at least three centuries , as Augustan poets identified his name with great elegiac writing . Propertius linked him to Callimachus with the following well @-@ known couplet :

The 1st @-@ century AD rhetorician Quintilian ranked Philitas second only to Callimachus among the elegiac poets . Philitas ' influence has been found or suspected in a wide range of ancient writing ; Longus ' 2nd century AD novel *Daphnis and Chloe* contains a character likely named after him . Almost all that he wrote seems to have disappeared within two centuries , though , so it is unlikely that any writer later than the 2nd century BC read any but a few of his lines .