

Alleviating death: Consolatory expressions in the Greek mummy labels from Roman Egypt

Dimitrios Roumpekas

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

dimroumpekas@yahoo.gr

Abstract

In this paper, I pursue to study the Greek version of the bilingual (Greek and Demotic) mummy labels from Roman Egypt. I detect expressions of salutation and condolence, which the writers of the tags addressed to the dead. The aim of the study is to place the consolatory devices among the other kinds of the ancient Greek consolatory literature, and reveal any links between the phrases of condolence and the social and religious status of the deceased and the writers of the mummy tags.

Keywords

Mummy labels, Condolence, Consolatory phrases

Death always scares the people; actually, we deny realizing that someday everyone will cease to live. In ancient times, people expressed grief and sympathy for the loss of a beloved person usually by alleviating the death, trying to persuade themselves and the other members of the community that death is an unavoidable destiny, and that the deceased, as a very kind, virtuous, and decent person, still fares well in a condition better than theirs.¹

Various ways of alleviating death are common in the ancient Greek and Latin consolatory texts, funerary epigrams, sepulchral inscriptions, and papyrus letters of condolence from Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt.² This paper aims to study the various phrases of salutation and condolence witnessed in the Greek mummy labels from Roman Egypt. Apart from placing these expressions

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** All dates are A.D., unless noted otherwise.

¹ The various beliefs about the soul after its separation from the body depended on the different moral, philosophical and religious conceptions of death in the ancient Greek and Christian thought. See indicatively Dodds 1965; Lattimore 1968, 21-28, 301; Davies 1999, 60-68, 129-138, 198-200; Bremmer 2002.

² Literature: Kassel 1958; Scourfield 1993; Baltussen 2012. Epigrams: Tsagalis 2008; Garulli 2012. Inscriptions: Bernard 1969; Guarducci 1974, 147-197; Guarducci 1987, 379-417. Papyri: Worp 1995, 149-154; Chapa 1998; Papatomas 1998, 195-206; Kotsifou 2012, I, 389-411.

among the other kinds of the ancient Greek consolatory literature, this study will lead us to conclusions on the relationship – if any – between the consolatory phrases and the age, the sex, the social status or the religious affiliation of the deceased and the tag writers.

Before proceeding with the study of the mummy tags, a brief presentation of the corpus would not be unnecessary.³ The mummy labels were written mainly to identify the deceased by name. They were linked to the Egyptian practice of mummification, adapted and evolved in the Greco-Roman and Byzantine burial practice.⁴ They were used mostly by the poorer part of the population, who were not able to pay for a tombstone. The vast majority of the labels are bilingual, i.e. in Demotic and Greek, the Greek version being a translation of the Demotic one for practical reasons, i.e. to facilitate the burials' work. Most of the Demotic versions contain a religious consolatory phrase, which is translated also in the Greek version, while the Greek version of some mummy tags includes a Greek word or phrase of salutation and condolence.⁵ In this paper, I deal with the Greek consolatory expressions on wooden mummy tags,⁶ for the collection of which I consulted the printed editions and the relevant electronic data. For the analysis of the consolatory elements, I follow passages from the ancient Greek consolatory literature, inscriptions, epigrams, and papyrus letters.⁷

Consolatory expressions

Salutation to the deceased

Salutation to the deceased, mainly with the verbs εὐψυχεῖν («farewell») and εὐτυχεῖν («farewell»; lit. «to be fortunate»), is undoubtedly the most common device of condolence in the Greek mummy labels. The verb εὐψυχεῖν, used as a consolatory verb to the living in two papyri of condolence,⁸ is detected in more than thirty wooden tags, linen mummy-wrappers, masks and coffin inscriptions so far.⁹ On the contrary, εὐτυχεῖν, though very frequent in the papyrus letters,¹⁰ is mentioned in only

³ See in general Quaegebeur 1978; Depauw 1997, 121; Arlt 2011.

⁴ On the pharaonic mummification and the adaptation of the old techniques to new needs in Greco-Roman and Late Antique Egypt see Youtie 1973, 419-420; Budge 1974; Drexhage 1995; Montserrat 1997, 33-44; Davies 1999, 32-39; Taylor 2001; Dunand 2007, 169-172; Torallas Tovar 2014, 129-140.

⁵ Quaegebeur 1978, 245, 251-253; Arlt 2011. On the use of Demotic in religious texts in Roman Egypt see Hoffmann 2000, 18; Torallas Tovar 2010, 259.

⁶ I use the inscribed mummy portraits, masks, linen wrappers or coffins as parallels. On this kind of source see Edgar 1905; Borg 1996, with bibliography; Riggs 2005; Nachtergaele 2008, 55-72.

⁷ The different features and the special purposes of the various kinds of written sources must be taken into consideration.

⁸ P.Oxy. I 115 (2nd cent., Oxyrhynchus), l. 2. P.IFAO II 11 (2nd cent.?), l. 3. See Chapa 1998, 25, 36-37, 41 and 62.

⁹ Wooden mummy labels: P.Coll.Youtie II 116 and 119; SB I 777, 835, 1427, 3837, 3844-3845, 3878, 5626, 5985, SB V 8696, SB XII 10826, SB XIV 11939, SB XVIII 13645, SB XX 14374, 15115, SB XXVIII 16861; T.Mom.Louvre 625 and 857. Linen wrappers: P.Batav. 39; SB I 5993-5998, SB III 6700, SB XIV 11695, SB XXVIII 16977. Coffins: SB XII 11201, 11202 (a) and (b). Mask: SB I 1423. Εὐψυχεῖν occurs also in many Christian and metric inscriptions. See Bernard 1969; Lefebvre 1907, XXX.

¹⁰ Exler 1923; White 1986, 198-200.

four mummy tags.¹¹ Finally, χαίρειν («farewell»), the most common salutation verb in the Greek papyri,¹² funerary inscriptions, and epigrams,¹³ occurs only in the mummy tag SB V 8695, l. 3. Apart from the brevity that characterizes the salutation consolatory device, suitable for the restricted space of a label, the expressions that include (only) a verb could represent concise prayers that accompanied the wayfarer's soul to the long journey away from the body. Additionally, this wish, usually addressed to the living, could create the illusion that the dead are still alive in one's mind, which is a way to persuade oneself that the person who has died still fares well.

Since both the number of the mummy labels that contain the salutation consolatory formula and the uniformity of their context do not allow us to examine each text in detail, let us refer to some interesting, peculiar cases. SB V 8695, ll. 1-3: Σέμνη Μενάνιδρου, χρηστή καὶ | ἄλυπε, χαίρει is the only mummy label in which the verb χαίρειν is testified. The writer also describes both the character of Semne when she was alive¹⁴ and her present condition, using the adjectives χρηστή («good») and ἄλυπος («free from sorrow»),¹⁵ very common in many funerary inscriptions.¹⁶ Of much interest is the wooden mummy label SB XXVIII 16861 (3rd cent.), in which the salutatory verb εὐτύχει (l. 5) is accompanied by the adjective ἀσύγκριτος «incomparable», «unique» (l. 3), addressed to the fifth-year-old Aurelius Castor alias Senekion from his father. The disarmingly honest and affecting epithet is addressed also to the sixth-year-old Aurelia Techosous, in SB XXVIII 16862 (ca. 212), ll. 2-3, and to the twentieth-year-old Aurelia Teremouthis, in SB XXVIII 16863 (ca. 212), l. 3. Finally, SB I 5462 and 5415 (1st-4th cent.) include the phrase ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ, another way to wish «farewell» to the wayfarer.

Premature death

To maintain that the death of a person was rather untimely represented a great means of expressing sympathy with his relatives and friends.¹⁷ The epithet used in that case was ἄωρος («premature»),¹⁸

¹¹ SB I 2484-2486 and SB X 10660 (2nd-4th cent.).

¹² Exler 1923.

¹³ Lattimore 1968, 235-237; Guarducci 1974, III, 150; Garulli 2012, 61-62. On the consolatory verbs χαίρει / χαίρετε addressed to the passers-by who see the inscribed epigram cf. Tsagalis 2008, 20, 83-84.

¹⁴ Cf. Tsagalis 2008, 40.

¹⁵ Cf. Plut., *Moralia, Cons. Apoll.* 107 A Babbitt: ὄρα δὲ καὶ τοῦ βίου τὸ ὀδυνηρὸν καὶ τὸ πολλαῖς φροντίσιν ἐπλητλημένον, ἃς εἰ βουλοίμεθα καταριθμεῖσθαι, λίαν ἂν αὐτοῦ καταγνοίημεν, ἐπαληθεύσαιμεν δὲ καὶ τὴν παρ' ἐνίοις κρατούσαν δόξαν ὡς ἄρα κρείττον ἐστὶ τὸ τεθνάναι τοῦ ζῆν. Lattimore 1968, 205-210, 326-327; Chapa 1998, 37.

¹⁶ I quote here only two examples: I.Métr. 13 (Roman period?, Hermonthis), ll. 7-8: Εὐβιε, ἄωρε, | χρηστὲ χαίρει. I.Métr. 75 (Roman period, Thebes), l. 6: νῦν τὸν ἴσον τούτῳι χῶρον ἄλυπον ἔχων. For further information see Guarducci 1974, III, 150-152.

¹⁷ Cf. Plut., *Moralia, Cons. Apoll.* 110 D-E: Νῆ Δί' ἀλλὰ τοὺς πολλοὺς κινεῖ πρὸς τὰ πένθη καὶ τοὺς θρήνους ὁ ἄωρος θάνατος. Ἀλλὰ καὶ οὗτος οὕτως ἐστὶν εὐπαραμύθητος. 113 D: Εἴ γε μὴν ὁ ἄωρος θάνατος κακὸν ἐστὶν, ἀωρότατος ἂν εἴη ὁ τῶν νηπίων καὶ παίδων καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον ὁ τῶν ἄρτι γεγονότων. Hani 1972, 172. See also the notes of Tsagalis 2008, 200-201.

¹⁸ Cf. Theoc., *Ep.* 14, 1-2 Gow: Ἡ παῖς ὄχετ' ἄωρος ἐν ἐβδόμῳ ἥδ' ἐνιαυτῶ / εἰς Αἴδην πολλῆς ἡλικίης προτέρη.

which is witnessed in only one mummy label, SB I 5626 (ca. 100), ll. 1-3: Ἀρτεμιδώρα Ἀρ|ποκρῆ ἄωρος, (ἐτῶν) κζ, | εὐψύχει, though commoner in inscriptions, linen mummy-wrappers, and wooden coffins.¹⁹ Although in the majority of the texts the adjective refers to a relatively young dead (from 19 to 27 years old), it is also used for persons who died in older age, for instance 55 years old (linen mummy-wrapper SB I 1429).

Perpetual memory

The idea that the deceased will be remembered after his/her death²⁰ occurs very frequently in epigrams and inscriptions²¹ both in pagan and in the Christian period. This consolatory device, chiefly by the epithet ἀείμνηστος or the compound εἰσαείμνηστος («remembered forever»), is encountered in the mummy label T.Mom.Louvre 1175 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 1, in which one reads ἀείμνηστος ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς Σενπετεμίνι<ο>ς.²² In the following cases, the compound phrase εἰσαείμνηστος or εἰσαείμνηστον (τὸ ὄνομα) is encountered: it is used for Haryotes (SB III 6138, 2nd-3rd cent., ll. 1-2: εἰσαείμνηστος ἡ ψυ|χὴ Ἄρυώτου) or the three-year-old Artemidora, who died at her birthday (T.Mom.Louvre 902, 2nd-3rd cent., ll. 3-6: ἐν γὰρ | τῇ γενεθλίῳ ἡμέραι ἐτε|λεύτησεν. Εἰσαείμνηστον <τὸ ὄνομα>). Other cases: SB I 1208. l. 4, T.Mom.Louvre 682 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 4; 685 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 5; 723 (3rd cent.), ll. 4-5; 822 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 6; 890 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 3; 918 (2nd-3rd cent.), ll. 1-2.

Death is common to all

The idea of death's inevitability is a recurrent *topos* in every kind of consolatory text²³ and receives different forms, such as «nothing can be done», «no one is immortal» or «death is common to all». Most of these expressions include the adjective ἀνθρώπινος («human»)²⁴ or the epithet ἀθάνατος

¹⁹ Some instances: Inscriptions: SB I 9-12; I.Métr. 80, ll. 5-7. Linen wrappers: SB I 1429, 5984, 5993, SB III 6700. Wooden sarcophagi: SB XII 11201, 11202 (a) and (b).

²⁰ On the significance of the commemoration in the ancient Greek, Latin, and Christian times see Whittaker 2011, 1-2; Barton et al. (eds.) 2007.

²¹ Lattimore 1968, 243-246; Guarducci 1974, III, 150.

²² The same adjective occurs in the linen wrappers SB I 3963, ll. 1-2; SB XIV 11694 (3rd-4th cent.). An instance from the sepulchral inscriptions: I.Métr. 60 (4th cent., Hermonthis?), l. 3: σῶμα μὲν ἐνθάδε κείται ἀειμνήστου Μακαρείης. See also Quaegebeur 1978, 251-254.

²³ Plut., *Moralia*, *Cons. Apoll.* 106 C: Ὡστε καταφανές εἶναι ὅτι ὁ παραμυθούμενος τὸν λελυπημένον καὶ δεικνύων κοινὸν καὶ πολλῶν τὸ συμβεβηκός. Epigrams: Lattimore 1968, 250-256; Tsagalís 2008, 38-39. Inscriptions: Guarducci 1974, III, 153. Papyri: Chapa 1998, 35-37; Kotsifou 2012, 394, 395-396, 399.

²⁴ Chapa 1998, 35.

(«immortal») with a negative element. This type of condolence was often combined with exhortatory phrases, such as εὐψύχει, θάρσει, εὐθύμει, μὴ λυπῆς («be brave», «be cheerful», «do not be sad»)²⁵

This consolatory device occurs in some wooden mummy labels from Roman Egypt.²⁶ In SB I 3992, it is consisted of the exhortatory verb and the «no-one-is-immortal» phrase (ll. 2-3: μὴ ληπίς, οὐδὶς ἀνθ|άνιτων; leg. μὴ λυπεῖς, οὐδεὶς ἀθ|άνατος), while in SB I 3514, 3515, and 5715, it is enhanced with the phrase ἐν (τῷ) κόσμῳ. The writer of the latter tag wrote the verb in the passive form and added the causal particle γάρ after οὐδεὶς so that the sense of the inscription is more complete (μὲ λυποῦ, οὐδὶς γὰρ ἀθάνατος ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ; l. μὴ, οὐδεὶς, κόσμῳ).

The deceased is along with the God(s)

The idea that the dead rest in peace in a place where God(s) live(s) was quite comforting. This means of sweetening the end of life is encountered chiefly in Christian texts.²⁷ Contrary to the various contradictory conceptions about the soul's destiny away from the body and the nature of the afterlife in the ancient Greek thought, the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead made the conception of the soul's existence after death and its resting in the Kingship of God more disambiguated.²⁸

In Egypt, the use of the consolatory religious formulas was a common practice both in pagan and in Christian funerary texts.²⁹ Many mortuary inscriptions from the Roman period refer to the deceased who have met with Osiris, the lord of the afterlife.³⁰ In many Christian inscriptions and papyri, the idea of the dead being with God is very frequent, too; apart from the periphrastic expression ἀπέρχομαι πρὸς θεόν («depart to the God»),³¹ the phrases ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραάμ, Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ («in

²⁵ E.g. IG XIV 1806 (Rome), Εὐψύχει, Μίδων· οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος. I.Métr. 55 (Imperial period), ll. 11-12. P.IFAO II 11. ll. 3-4 (after the suggestion of Chapa 1998, 163). P.Oxy. LV 3819 (4th cent., Oxyrhynchus), ll. 11-12: Μὴ οὖν λυπεῖσθαι. Ταῦτα γὰρ ἀνθρώπινά ἐστιν. See also P.Princ. II 102 (4th cent.), ll. 11-15: Τοιγαροῦν | ἀπόθου τὸ λυπηρὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου πνέσματος καὶ ἀπόβλη|ψον ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀθά|νατος εἰ μὴ <μό>νος [τὸν] ὁ θεός (l. πταίσματος, ἀπόβλεψον). Lefebvre 1907, XXX; Bernard 1967, 235.

²⁶ For the texts see Torallas Tovar 2011, 120-124.

²⁷ Lattimore 1968, 301-303.

²⁸ On this complicated topic see, in general, Bremmer 2002, 56-57. See also Davies 1999, 196-197; Scourfield 1993, 23, on the different approach to death and consolation in the Christian thought.

²⁹ Although it is difficult to identify the borders between the polytheistic and monotheistic belief in 2nd-4th cent. Egypt, words and phrases like ἐν κόλποις Ἀβραάμ ..., ἐν Κυρίῳ, ἀναπαύομαι, Ἀμήν, etc. are indications of monotheism. Choat / Nobbs 2001-2005, 36-51; Martinez 2009, 601-605, with bibliography. This kind of phrase functions also as indicator of the deceased's Christian belief. See Froschauer 2004, 98-100.

³⁰ Cf. I.Métr. 20 (Imperial period), ll. 8-9: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἰς (l. εἰς) Αἶδαο <κι>όντα σε / δέξετο Ὅσιρις. The commonest formulaic expression is δίοι σοι Ὅσιρις τὸ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ. Breccia 1911, nos. 332, 375. On the link between Osiris, water, and the soul's eternal life see Plut., *Moralia*, *Isid.* 364 A Griffiths: ... οὐ μόνον τὸν Νεῖλον Ὅσιριν καλοῦσιν οὐδὲ Τυφῶνα τὴν θάλασσαν, ἀλλ' Ὅσιριν μὲν ἀπλῶς ἅπασαν τὴν ὑδροποιὸν ἀρχὴν καὶ δύναμιν, αἰτίαν γενέσεως καὶ σπέρματος οὐσίαν. Wild 1981, 100-128; Wolf 2004, 78-80, 204-206; Davies 1999, 30-32. For the funerary expression ἐν τόπῳ ἀναψύξεως in Christian sepulchral inscriptions see I.Chr.Eg. 636, ll. 8-9.

³¹ Chrysanthou / Papathomas 2010, 19-20.

the blossoms of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob»)³² or ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κυρίῳ (Ἰησοῦ / Χριστῷ) («to sleep along with the Lord»)³³ reveal the belief in the idea that the dead rest in Heaven.

A popular consolatory device in pagan mummy tags is the idea that the deceased will continue to offer his/her services to Osiris in the realm of hereafter. Apart from the texts quoted by Quaegebeur,³⁴ I refer here to SB I 308 (3rd cent., Bompae), ll. 3-5: ἐξέσται σοὶ | ὑπηρετεῖν τὸν μέγαν θεῶν (1. θεόν) | Ὅσιριν. A variation of this kind of condolence is the belief that the dead will not cease to live once he/she is near the God, the most usual expressions being ζῆν/ζήσειν ἐν θεῷ or ζῆν τὸ ὄνομα (τοῦ δεῖνος) παρὰ (θεῷ), cf. SB III 7108: παρὰ Ὅσει|ρι ζῆ ἀ|τοῦ τὸ ὄνο|μα.³⁵

In the Christian mummy labels, the consolatory phraseology is different; the writers used phrases, such as ἐν Κυρίῳ/θεῷ. This phrase is witnessed in T.Mom.Louvre 1115 (2nd-3rd cent.), l. 4: ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κ(υρί)ῳ, probably Christian. In a Christian *milieu* we could include T.Mom.Louvre 1006 (3rd-4th cent.), in which the idea that a six-year-old boy will be along with the son of God (l. 4: αὐτὸν ἔχει θεοῦ τέκνον³⁶) is encountered.³⁷

Metaphorical and euphemistic terms

Sometimes the word «death» seems too cruel to be uttered by the people's mouth; they try anyhow to sweeten such cruelty by minimizing the inevitability of death and maximizing its desirability. People in antiquity used metaphorical and euphemistic terms to refer both to the end of life and the deceased;³⁸ they identified death with sleep³⁹ and considered that the dead were happy to have been rid of the worries of life.

³² Cf. *Ev. Luc.* 13, 22: ἐγένετο δὲ ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πτωχὸν καὶ ἀπενεχθῆναι αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἰς τὸν κόλπον Ἀβραάμ. 13, 28: ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων, ὅταν ὄψεσθε Ἀβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφήτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑμᾶς δὲ ἐκβαλλομένους ἔξω. Some examples: SB I 1600 (Christian period, Talmis), ll. 7-9. SB X 10516 (Christian period, Arsinoite Nome), ll. 7-8. I.Chr.Eg. 48 (409, Alexandria), ll. 12-13. Horsley 1983, 105-109; Kubińska, 1974, 75-82 and nos. 3, 5, 6, where a Greek Christian prayer is included. Cf. also the letter of condolence P.Oxy. XVI 1874 (6th-7th cent., Oxyrhynchus), ll. 15-16. Lefebvre 1907, XXX; Chapa 1998, 158; Kotsifou 2012, 399; Preda 2017, 36-44.

³³ E.g. I.Chr.Eg. 2 (530, Alexandria), ll. 1-3. I.Chr.Eg. 158 (5th-6th cent., Akoris), ll. 1-3.

³⁴ Quaegebeur 1978, 253-254.

³⁵ Cf. CIG 9791 (Christian period), ll. 1-2.

³⁶ Torallas Tovar 2017, 189-196.

³⁷ In a Christian *milieu* one could include the mummy tags in which ἀμήν («so it be») occurs. E.g. SB I 3533 (3rd-4th cent., Thebes), l. 2. Cf. the inscriptions SB IV 7321, l. 1; I.Fayoum I 30 (Christian period, Crocodilopolis), ll. 1-6. On ἀμήν see Moulton / Milligan 1929, 27, s.v. and above, n. 29.

³⁸ On the metaphorical and euphemistic language concerning death in antiquity see Giannakis 2001, 127. On the metaphors and euphemisms in ancient Greek funerary epigrams and papyri, in particular, see Montserrat 1997, 33-34; Chrysanthou / Papatomas 2010, 4-6, 10-12; Tueller 2016, 227-232.

³⁹ Such a metaphor was used more often for Christian dead by Christian writers. Lattimore 1968, 164, 307; Horsley 1983, 93; Tueller 2016, 230-232.

Although the analogy «death = sleep» was very popular in Christian sepulchral inscriptions, the majority of which come from Egypt,⁴⁰ such consolatory motive is encountered in only two Christian mummy tags. The verb κοιμᾶσθαι («to sleep»)⁴¹ refers to the death of Mercurius, in P.Haun. II 44 (4th-5th cent.), ll. 1-4: † Ἐκοιμήθη τοῦ | μακαρίτου | Μερκουρίου, while the same word occurs in T.Mom.Louvre 1115, ll. 1-4: Ἀρτεμιδώρας | Μικκάλου μητρος Παλινσκιαίνης πρεσβυτέρας | ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κ(υρίῳ). Of a similar sense is the euphemistic verb ἀναπαύεσθαι, («to rest»)⁴² in the mummy label SB I 1205, ll. 1-4: Σατρῆτις Ψευμαργῶτος, ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ ἀναπαυσάμενος.

Epithets with a metaphorical-euphemistic meaning, which refers to the deceased's release from the life concerns, define the condition of the dead. A popular adjective is εὖμοιρος⁴³ (fem. εὖμοιρία⁴⁴) «having a good fate», which characterizes three women from the same family⁴⁵ in the mummy labels T.Mom.Louvre 472, ll. 1-3; 864, ll. 1-3; SB I 1172, ll. 1-3.⁴⁶ Moreover, in SB XII 11090 (2nd-3rd cent., Saqqara) we encounter the verb εὖμοιρεῖν («have a good fate») in the sense of a wish to the deceased (ll. 1-3: Ανουβίων | Ἀρτεμιδώρου εὖμοίρει).

Let us finally refer to the identification of life with a journey on a road that leads to death.⁴⁷ Such a concept was common in pagan and Christian sepulchral inscriptions,⁴⁸ but not frequent in the papyri.⁴⁹ It is encountered in the mummy label SB I 1190 (Christian era), ll. 1-2: Ταῖσαι ἐβίωσεν εἴκοσι ὀκτώ, | γ(ίνονται) (ἔτη) κη. Εἰς τὴν λαμπρὰν (sc. ὁδὸν) ἀπῆλθεν.⁵⁰

Conclusions

Some of the issues, on which the examination of the consolatory language in the Greek mummy labels could shed light, are summarized in the following remarks:

a. The mummy labels and the consolatory literature. The mummy labels that include a consolatory expression could be added in the list of the consolatory texts. Not only are the similarities in the style and the context but also their twofold purpose, i.e. condolence and memorialisation, sufficient for this

⁴⁰ Lefebvre 1907, VII.

⁴¹ Chrysanthou / Papatomas 2010, 11.

⁴² Very common in Christian papyri and inscriptions. Chrysanthou / Papatomas 2010, 10.

⁴³ The term occurs in papyri and inscriptions too. Cf. P.Oxy. I 115 (2nd cent., Oxyrhynchus), ll. 3-4; P.Princ. II 102. ll. 4-6. I.Chr.Eg. 569, 581, 671. Lefebvre 1907, XXXI; Guarducci 1974, III, 153; Quaegebeur 1978, 251; Chapa 1998, 29-30; Kotsifou 2012, 395.

⁴⁴ On this form of the feminine see Derda 1986, 87-89.

⁴⁵ Derda 1986, 89.

⁴⁶ The adjective occurs in two other tags: T.Mom.Louvre 411 (3rd cent.) and 412 (2nd-3rd cent.). For the relation between the latter and the labels mentioned above see Derda 1986, 89 and n. 15.

⁴⁷ Lattimore 1968, 169.

⁴⁸ E.g. I.Métr. 29 (3rd cent. B.C., Alexandria), l. 6: [εἶ]σι μέλαιναν ὁδόν. I.Métr. 33 (Ptolemaic period, Herakleopolis), l. 26: πᾶσιν δ' ἥδ' ὑπόκειται ὁδός. I.Chr.U.R. 1, 712. l. 5: σπεῦδεν ὁδὸν θεῖην.

⁴⁹ Chrysanthou / Papatomas 2010, 20.

⁵⁰ Chrysanthou / Papatomas 2010, loc. cit.

categorization. Moreover, unlike the other kinds of consolatory texts, of which the style and consolatory ideas were to be appreciated by their readers, the mummy wooden tags were to inform the buriers on the identity of the dead. It is surprising, therefore, that these fragmentary, brief, and humble texts could contain phrases with elements that stimulate the (ancient or modern) readers' mind and emotions.

b. Consolatory language and the status of the deceased. The writers who included an expression to sweeten the wayfarers' fate focused on four points: i. Salutation to the dead, ii. Unavoidability of death, iii. Description of the deceased's character and condition either while alive or dead, iv. Certain religious expressions. Although it is not easy to precisely determine on which criteria the writers based to choose these consolatory devices, let us make some remarks. The brevity and conciseness of the salutation phrases made them a very common means of condolence, adapted to the social or religious status of any dead. The latter feature characterizes the «no-one-is-immortal» expression, too. The epithets that determined the dead must have been a way to express sympathy. Some of them, such as εἰσαεἰμνηστος and εὔμοιρος, were used regardless of the age or the sex of the dead, while ἄωρος was utilized mainly for persons of a relatively young age. As far as the religious formulae are concerned, they could reveal the religious affiliation of the dead.⁵¹

c. Consolatory language and the status of the writers. The terseness of the mummy labels does not allow us to determine in detail the aspects of the writers' status (i.e. education, religious affiliation, nationality). It should be pointed out that the writers in the Roman period were members of the traditional *collegia* of funerary workers in Egypt, while the writers of the Christian texts were probably Christian workers, who did not abandon but gradually adapted the traditional burial techniques. We do not know whether the same writer wrote both the Greek and the Demotic version of a text. In that case, it is quite sure that the majority of the writers were bilingual and of a quite high educational level.⁵² Finally, in the question how one could interpret the use of the consolatory language by writers who had seemingly no personal relationship with the deceased, one may speak about either an intention on behalf of the writers to keep up with the family's requests concerning the consolatory expressions or even a voluntary initiative of the writers, who found it appropriate – their religious task given – to add a wish or a phrase of condolence, to accompany the dead beyond the grave.

⁵¹ Sometimes the brevity of the texts and the existence of consolatory expressions, used in both pagan and Christian contexts, do not allow us to determine whether a text refers to Christian or pagan wayfarers.

⁵² On the writers' bilingualism see Quaegebeur 1978, 246-247.

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