# THE MARRIAGE OF MELES AND ANTONINA: A RECENTLY DISCOVERED GREEK PROSE EPITHALAMIUM BY PROCOPIUS OF GAZA

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce a general classicist audience to the recently discovered Greek prose epithalamium for the marriage of the late ancient Gazan couple Meles and Antonina by Procopius of Gaza. Although we have prescriptions on how to write prose epithalamia in rhetorical treatises, before the discovery of the new epithalamium we had only three examples of them in Greek (one by Himerius [4th c.] and two by Choricius of Gaza [5th-6th cc.]). I shall introduce the new epithalamium and assess its place vis-à-vis the other three Greek prose epithalamia.

My remarks will have four key focal points. First, I shall observe how standard epithalamic rubrics are deployed in the new epithalamium. Especially significant here are the long section on the god Gamos and the mythological-cosmological origins of marriage, the argument that marriage is a good thing, praise of the groom and bride and their families, and the motif of the harmony of the spouses. The Empedoclean material in the mythological-cosmological section will be of interest to pre-Socratic specialists.

Secondly, the chiastic arrangement of the praises of the couple and their fathers is noteworthy; such structural balances and contrasts are common in late ancient oratory.

Thirdly, the couple in the new epithalamium are cousins, just as the couple in the Himerian epithalamium are distant relatives. Both orations share the motifs that the couples have a "common root" and that a family that "diverged" is now been reunited. Such marriages were probably common among the local elites.

Finally, all four Greek prose epithalamia are by sophists honoring students or former students. And they all display, playfully, the motif of conflict between the Muses (study, rhetoric) and the allure of Eros in young men. More importantly, the epithalamizing sophist highlights the importance both of *paideia* and of a "good" marriage for the local elites.

Bibliography:

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