Gregor Staab’s study of funerary verse inscriptions from the Greek East is a welcome addition to scholarship dealing with insizational epigrams. The monograph is closely tied to the five-volume collection *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten* (SGO), produced by Reinhold Merkelbach and Josef Stauber between 1998 and 2004. These two scholars rendered an invaluable service by making succinct editions of verse inscriptions from the Greek East easily available. Staab’s monograph is a first large-scale attempt at making sense of the material collected in SGO. It offers a synthetic study of the overarching themes of the literary culture within which private verse epitaphs were inscribed, which Staab is uniquely positioned to do: not only has he been involved in the publication of some of the recently excavated monuments with verse inscriptions but he has also been preparing a collection of epigrams that had been omitted from SGO or were found after the appearance of the volumes. That this ‘upgrade’ alone is to include about 400 inscriptions reflects well the scale of the material he is dealing with. It also explains the subtitle of the book, “neue und alte Grabepigramme des Griechischen Osten”, where ‘alte’ refers to inscriptions included in SGO and ‘neue’ to those that postdate the collection.

Since SGO is a cornerstone of Staab’s study, its arrangement and coverage warrants a few words here. The collection comprises epigrams—2,122, according to Staab—of any genre that survive from the Greek East, excluding Egypt, which were either preserved on stone or were likely inscribed on stone but survive only in the manuscript tradition. Each of the inscriptions has a tripartite number in the format xx/yy/zz. The first number identifies one of the 22 regions in which inscriptions are grouped, from Coastal Caria (01) to Naba-tea/Arabia (22); the second number refers to smaller geographic localities within each region; the third identifies each inscription within these localities, with the sequence of texts proceeding from oracular pronouncements and
other cult related texts to honorary, building, and, finally, funerary inscriptions. All but the last volume of SGO, which is devoted mostly to indices, have schematic maps of the geographical areas to which the identifiers are keyed. While Staab takes over the reference system of SGO,\textsuperscript{1} his monograph unfortunately does not feature any maps.

Staab confines himself to private verse epitaphs, only occasionally alluding to other genres of inscriptive poetry, and views them as the unique product of the literary tradition, on the one hand, and of concrete and quotidian circumstances, or the \textit{Alltagswelt}, on the other. A short introduction to the subject of inscriptive verse epitaphs is followed by Part I, which is meant as a systematic investigation into the cultural parameters of inscribing verse epitaphs in the Greek East. Part II serves to illustrate the general principles and ideas discussed in Part I on the basis of 19 verse epitaphs, which are accompanied by (re)editions arranged into four thematic sections in accordance with the profession or the circumstances of death of the commemorated person. An appendix featuring texts of epigrams referred to in the book but not included in SGO concludes the study.

In the Introduction, Staab gives a brief description of the material and the organization of his monograph. He estimates all surviving verse epitaphs dating between the 7th century BCE and ca. 650 CE at ca. 5,000, and lays out his reasons for considering them as a reflection of the \textit{Alltagswelt}, a term which is perhaps difficult to render in English, for any implication of ‘everyday’, be it life or world, does not really describe the singular uniqueness of death. The term rather designates ordinary and concrete persons and the individual circumstances of their lives, to which epitaphs give a glimpse and which, in turn, affect the language and imagery of inscriptive epigrams.

Part I, “Epigramm zwischen Literatur und Alltagswelt”, comprises five chapters, the first of which, “Literaturhistorische Grundlagen”, discusses the development of the so-called book-epigram from the inscriptive epigram, as well as the origin of the latter and the genre-constituents of the former. Staab insists on the importance of distinguishing the circumstances in which literary and inscriptive epigrams were composed; this difference in intention and means of communicating justify, in his view, the use of the term ‘subliterary’ for inscriptive verses. In Chapter II, “Alltagsweltliche Voraussetzungen”, Staab

\textsuperscript{1} The new epigrams are marked by an asterisk in front of the reference number, i.e. *xx/yy/zz
considers verse epitaphs as evidence for ancient education. Whereas, for Asia Minor, we may lack direct evidence for school curricula, such as papyri furnish for Greco-Roman Egypt, verse inscriptions form a rich and still underestimated source of information about educational practices and literary competence among the people involved in composing and commissioning them. Not only are there references to education and teachers in inscriptions, but, more significantly, literary and formal features of verse inscriptions expose attitudes towards the classical tradition in the Greek East and indicate how it was received. Staab demonstrates that in the Hellenistic period education as reflected in verse inscriptions tended to be of a relatively high level and concentrated in the big coastal cities, while in the imperial period there was both a geographical diffusion and a qualitative weakening of it. The law of Vespasian of 74 CE, which freed teachers from paying taxes, just as it did doctors, and the fact that by the time of Antoninus Pius (138–161 CE) the designation grammaticos became a kind of controlled and protected occupation played a significant role in larger educational politics and may have been responsible not only for the spreading of literacy but also for the supporting of literary aspirations.

Staab analyzes the presentation of teachers in several epitaphs, showing how the epigrams may have been their own compositions. He then discusses the importance of education for those with public careers, adducing, in particular, inscriptive evidence for travel for educational purposes. The chapter concludes with reflections on the significance of Homer in Asia Minor, where, Staab argues, the epic was not only a subject of school, but also shaped cultural identity in everyday life.

Chapter III, “Homer zu Sublimierung der Alltagswelt”, is an enlightening exploration of various ways in which Homeric language, forms, and citations were employed by the composers of verse epitaphs to commemorate the deceased. From numerous examples, Staab illustrates familiarity with Homeric texts and, among other interesting observations, demonstrates that Homer was cited not from memory, or not only from memory, but from rolls. Thus, he argues that the reduplication in expressions such as ἐνὶ μεγάροις ought to have stemmed from the transmission of the text in papyri, where it is common from the Ptolemaic period on. Besides citations of Homeric expressions, a more creative approach to the epic is found in verse epitaphs associated with people of more advanced education, such as doctors. For example, there seems
to be a tendency to cast travels endured by a doctor on the model of the travels of Odysseus.

Significantly, Homeric language and imagery remain in use in Christian epitaphs. Here, Staab refers to a study by Thonemann, who on the basis of the usage of Homeric vocabulary and motifs was able to distinguish several groups of grave epigrams and associate them with particular composers.²

Chapter IV, “Nachhomerische literarische Tradition im Spiegel der Alltagsdichtung” investigates how the demands of a specific situation of commemoration were met by the poetic means arising from the literary tradition from Hesiod to Hellenistic poets, including learned allusions as well as comparisons to literary figures and their poetry. Here, there is an interesting exposition of individual cases in which the commemorated person was compared to a literary figure, as, for example, doctor Philadelphos who is compared by a pupil to Hippocrates (06/02/32), or a certain Kyrion from Nikomedia (*09/06/23), who served on the council of this city for 40 years and whose wisdom and abilities are likened to Hesiod, Archilochus, Menander, and Xenophon.

In the last chapter, “Epigraphische Muster: ‘pattern-books’ und Standardverse”, Staab argues convincingly that there is little evidence to postulate the existence of copy-books (I choose to avoid the word ‘pattern-books’, as some may associate it with activities such as sewing) that circulated exclusively for epigraphic practice. He seems, however, to be somewhat tilting at windmills: it is important for his argument to contrast personal notes or notebooks that a poet or stonecutter (they may have been one and the same) could use, and ‘manuels professionnels’, special handbooks of formulas on the basis of which a poet or stonecutter could build an epigram. One can hardly disagree that “[d]ie Vorstellung, es habe zu allen Zeiten überregional umlaufend Musterbücher gegeben, aus denen heraus die Epigrammautoren ihre Inschriften konstruierten, schränkt in ihrer Allgemeinheit die Interpretation des einzelnen Grabgedichtes ein” (p. 127), but this is unfairly dismissive of those who have deliberated on the possible transmission of certain motifs via copy-books of epigrams, perhaps along with passages of Homer and other authors. Staab actually admits that in some cases finished verses have been adapted to the requirements of another situation and that such a conjecture may be justified if the verse has been destroyed by the insertion of individual personal names.

This happens quite often in verse epitaphs and Staab brings in several interesting examples himself. He then devotes a short study to the ‘saying of Kerellaios’, a famous motif attested in perhaps as many as three dozen epitaphs, and argues that the variety of forms in which the saying occurs suggests not a transmission through copy-books, but a widespread notion of the sentiment, which finds varying expressions.

The last section of the chapter is devoted to metrical curses from Phrygia, which are attested in an iambic form in the North and as a dactylic hexameter in the East. There are a stunning 57 occurrences of the former, which are mostly added to non-metrical epitaphs. It is likely that a local tradition without any recourse to a literary template was responsible for a practice that may have been viewed as having a magic function, a fascinating insight to a potential function of a verse.

Part II of the book comprises editions of 19 epitaphs, all but three of which had been edited elsewhere but postdate the publication of SGO. The inscriptions are arranged thematically: first come seven epitaphs for gladiators, followed by three epigrams for young mothers; four epitaphs then illustrate the subject of premature death, two of them for young slaves; the last section comprises five verse epitaphs for persons of public standing (“Personen des öffentlichen Lebens”), such as doctors, politicians, and teachers. All editions are accompanied by photographs of the monument or the inscription (or its squeeze), detailed commentaries, and translations, the absence of which elsewhere in the book is rather unfortunate. In comparison to the conciseness of editions in SGO, Staab’s descriptions of the physical aspects of the inscriptions and commentaries to the texts are much more detailed and meticulous.

The Appendix is said to include metrical inscriptions that are referred to in the main body of the book but not found in SGO, presumably put together for the convenience of the reader. Inscriptions here feature minimal data: a brief heading with references to publications, which is followed by the Greek text and very brief notes of various nature; there are no translations. Not all the inscriptions in the Appendix are in fact referred to in the book, a fact easily revealed by the index to the volume. Several of those are the Phrygian epitaphs with metrical curses, but there are others, too. For example, *12/06/01, which is an important dedication from Ai Khanum, does not seem to figure anywhere in the book.
Overall, this is a fruitful study that gives new perspective on inscriptive verse epitaphs. I have only a couple of negative observations: It would have benefited from the inclusion of maps, from a clear statement early in the book of the arrangement of SGO (it does not appear until the Appendix), and, above all, from translations. Even if the Greek of the epigrams normally is not very difficult, it is also often far from straightforward, and thus a reader may be left to wonder how the author understands this or that verse; nor do those with little or no knowledge of Greek deserve to be excluded from access to this wonderful material.

The book is well executed. I noticed very few typos and infelicities, such as on p. 119, where SGO 03/02/19 should be SGO 03/02/198; on p. 199, “siehe oben *17/23/01 (S. 264)” should presumably be “unten”; on p. 288, “in v. 14 erwähnten hymnischen Nachruf” should be v. 13. It is also a pity that paragraphoi are not indicated in the texts, although they are commented upon (e.g. in the text of *06/02/37, p. 289). I missed SEG 41:226 in the discussion of the so-called Homer epitaph, which is likely to be the earliest inscriptive attestation of the motif, and wondered why Melitta, the deceased commemorated by CEG 571, is said to be young (p. 74), though nothing suggests this in the epitaph, nor in the relief. But these are very minor issues. The book is an important contribution to the study of inscriptive verses in general and those from the Greek East in particular; it also opens up many directions for futures studies and makes one look forward to the promised 400-item rich upgrade to the volumes of SGO.

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