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***Embedding religion in epigrammatic poetry:  
The Adonia in Poseidippos 53 AB***

**ABSTRACT:**

Among the epigrams contained in the Milan papyrus (P. Mil. Volg. VIII. 309), attributed to the third-century BC poet Poseidippos of Pella, is epitaph no. 53 (Austin-Bastianini), which commemorates the death of the maiden Kalliope, lamented by her female companions. The epigram poignantly expresses sadness for a life cut short, but the circumstances of Kalliope's death—falling from a rooftop during an all-night festival—are very unusual.

This fascinating and carefully crafted epigram has received little attention by literary scholars and has been overlooked by Greek religion specialists studying festivals. In this paper, we argue that most likely this epigram is fictitious and contains a variety of key words, images and clever allusions to archaic poetry that point to the fictional death having occurred at the celebration of the Adonia. During this rowdy nocturnal festival, held annually in various parts of the Greek world, groups of women mourned the death of Adonis, the young lover of Aphrodite. The poet may have taken inspiration from celebrations of the Adonia in Alexandria, in which he resided, or even perhaps in Macedonia, and specifically in his hometown of Pella.