PALLADAS OF ALEXANDRIA ON WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Among the epigrams collected in the Palatine and Planudean Anthologies under the name of Palladas of Alexandria (c. 350 CE), thirteen are explicitly concerned with the theme of women (9.165-168; 10.55, 56, 86; 11.54, 286, 287, 306, 381, 378). In this article the language and content of these poems are analysed in order to determine the poet's views on and attitude to women and the way he communicates these.

Introduction

Palladas was active in Alexandria around the second half of the 4th century CE. This dating is deduced from references in his poems to Themistius, praefectus urbi of Constantinople in 384 (11.292),1 the destruction of the Sarapeion library and other pagan sanctuaries by Christians in 391 after the edict of Theodosius, the emperor in the East (10.90; 9.528, 175; cf. 9.37) and perhaps the defeat of Eugenius, usurper emperor in the West in 394 (10.84). By his own admission he wrote 10.97, probably in 391, at the age of 72, which would place his birth around 319.2

Palladas is represented in the Anthologia Palatina and Anthologia Planudea by about 160 epigrams – more than any other poet in these collections.3 His epigrams were known among all classes, also in written form.4 On the other hand, modern assessments of his work have been negative or ambiguous. Thus Paton, in his Introduction to Book 9 of the Palatine, writes dismissively: 'It [Philippus’s Garland] contains a good deal of the Alexandrian Palladas,

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1 Palladas’s epigrams in the Anthologia Palatina (AP) and Anthologia Planudea (AP) are cited by book and poem number alone. The text is that of Beckby 1967-68.
2 On the biographical details, see Bowra 1959:266-67; Keydell 1962; Peek 1965:159-60; Lesky 1966:737-811; Hight 1979; Cameron 1993:90; Henderson 2008b:115-16.
3 See Peek 1965:160-61.
...most of which we could well dispense with', and, in the Introduction to
Book 10, grudgingly: 'a versifier as to whose merit there is much difference
of opinion, but who is at least interesting as the sole poetical representative
of his time and surroundings.' Georg Luck (1958) describes Palladas as 'one
of the least known poets of the Greek Anthology' (455), condemns the
epigrams for their shallow pessimism and eccentric invective, acknowledges
Palladas's skill as a literary craftsman who handled the epigrammatic form
very competently and imaginatively, and also gained popularity among the
uneducated (458), yet whose invectives are too one-sided in not recognising
'the good and the beautiful next to the corrupt and the ridiculous in human
life', whose 'satirical temper is a "disease", perhaps we should say, a form of
neurosis' (467), and whose 'satire [is] like distorting mirrors at carnivals ... his
elocution is, indeed, the eloquence of the manager of a freak show.'
However, there is little doubt that, as the last significant exponent of the
Greek epigram, he is an important figure, even an innovator, in the history
of this genre.

His themes are varied, but the mood is mostly pessimistic or grimly
realistic. Faced with the new order which was physically and spiritually
destroying his Greek heritage, he pities and criticises his fellow Greeks, or
'Hellenes', for their terrible plight (10.82, 89, 90). He mocks the demoted
status of the old Greek gods: a discarded roadside statue of Heracles accep­
ting change (9.441); the Olympians safely converted to Christianity (9.528);
Eros recyled as the handle of a frying-pan and himself now having to endure
fire (9.773 and 16.194) and now harmlessly holding a dolphin and a flower
instead of bow and arrow (16.207); and Zeus a bad lover (5.257) and all but
guilty of patricide (10.53). The reigning deities are now the unpredictable
and arbitrary Tyche (9.180-83; 10.62, 65, 73, 77, 80, 87, 96) and Sarapis
(9.174, 378). Various individuals, types and groups become the targets of his
anger: government officials (9.393; 11.283-85), monks (11.384), the wealthy
(10.60, 61, 93), and women. It is the last group that is the subject matter of
this article. Detailed analysis of the content and language of each epigram
may contribute to a more soundly-based evaluation of Palladas's poetic skill.

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Highet 1979:393; Cameron 1993:16, 80-81, 90-96, 263-64, 322-23; Albiani 2007;
Henderson 2008a and b.
On women in general

Palladas did not write his epigrams on women in a vacuum. A brief examination of his fellow epigrammatists in the Anthology provides a part of the literary context and a body of similar poetry against which to gauge Palladas’s work. Among the hundreds of epigrams preserved in the Palatine and Planudean Anthologies, there are relatively few negative views on women. Instead, we encounter a whole range of attitudes among the male poets. A multitude of epigrammatists praise girls and women for their beauty, skill at lyre-playing and singing, speech and wisdom. Some poets express their love of women despite the effects of ageing, while others mock or scorn older women (mostly prostitutes) for the loss of their youth and looks. Some epigrammatists evoke the world of young girls who dedicate their prized possessions to Aphrodite, or portray the professional lives of prostitutes positively, recording how they, too, dedicated such gifts to Aphrodite. A large number of dedicatory epigrams pay homage to women before and after marriage, after childbirth, and as spinsters. Some poets mourn the death of virgins; others, again, warn men against marriage; and one argues that all was not Pandora’s fault, but that the good (rather than the evil) things of life had flown upwards out of her jar and landed everywhere except on earth, resulting in only ageing women and an

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8 Mostly collected in AP 5; e.g. Meleager, AP 5.139, 140; Philodemus, AP 5.131. There are also praises addressed to poets like Sappho and Erinna: e.g. Antipater of Sidon, AP 7.14, 15; Asclepiades, AP 7.11; Leonidas, AP 7.13; and the Ptolemaic queens: Berenice (Callim. AP 5.146) and Arsinoe (Damagetus, AP 6.277).
9 Philodemus, AP 5.13; Asclepiades, AP 7.217; Paulus Silentiarius, AP 5.258, 259.
10 Plato, AP 6.1; Hedylyus, AP 5.161; Meleager, AP 5.175, 180; Macedonius Consul, AP 11.370; Lucillus, AP 11.236, 310; Anon., AP 11.297.
11 Antipater, AP 6.174.
13 Palladas, AP 6.60, 61; Archilochus, AP 6.133; Antipater, AP 6.206, 208, 209; Archias, AP 6.207; Nossis, AP 6.275; Antipater, AP 6.276; Anon., AP 6.280; Leonidas, AP 6.281.
14 Agathias Scholasticus, AP 6.59; Callimachus, AP 6.146; Leonidas, AP 6.200, 202; Marcus Argentario, AP 6.201; Nicetas, AP 6.270; Phaedimus, AP 6.271; Perses, AP 6.272; Perses, AP 6.274. Cf. also Nossis (?), AP 6.273.
16 Meleager, AP 7.182; Antipater of Thessalonica, AP 7.185; Eutolmus Scholasticus Illustris, AP 7.611; Julianus Praefectus, AP 7.605; Parmenion (?), AP 7.183, 184.
17 Lucillus, AP 11.388.

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empty jar. \textsuperscript{18} None of these themes appear in Palladas’s work. His main focus is on Woman.

Woman is the wrath of Zeus, given in exchange for fire as a gift, a grievous exchange for fire. For she scorches a man and wastes him away with cares, and brings premature age upon youth.

Even Zeus does not have golden-throned Hera unvexed: often, in fact, he's thrown her out from the gods, suspended in the air and clouds. Homer knew this, and has described Zeus as angry with his wife. Thus never is a woman in tune with her spouse, not even when coupled on a golden floor.

(9.165)

The opening lines recall Hesiod’s account of how Zeus punished Prometheus for stealing fire from the gods by making him create woman. The god’s anger gives a wry, sarcastic tone to δόρον. The emphasis on fire (the repeated πυρός) as an exchange (ἀντιδοθείσα, ἀντίδοτον) for woman indicates that this was no ordinary, fair exchange of gifts, a thought made explicit in the concluding phrase of the couplet: ἄνηρ ὁ πυρὸς ἀντίδοτον. Palladas, in other words, is saying that fire would have been more beneficial to mankind than woman. The next couplet gives the reasons: simplistically stated, a woman burns a man out and destroys him with worries. The language is, however, more complex than that. The verbs ἐκκαίω (or ἐκκάιω) and μαραίνω share overlapping semantic spheres (in italics and underlined): the former is used of burning or setting alight\textsuperscript{20} or scorching,\textsuperscript{21} the latter of quenching fire or putting out eyesight\textsuperscript{22} or, in the passive,
of wasting or withering away, for example as a result of disease.\textsuperscript{23} The verbs are therefore both contrastive (causing and extinguishing fire) and complementary (scorching and withering away). The dominant idea is of a fire (passion) that has replaced the one Zeus denied mankind and one that ages men prematurely.\textsuperscript{24}

In the next two couplets the poet universalises the situation by submitting even Zeus to the same lot. Hera vexes him, he evicts her to hang in mid-air, and even Homer describes their quarrels.\textsuperscript{25} Common words echo the ordinary nature of their relationship. Despite their divine stature and abode, they behave exactly like humans, even to the extent of having sex on the floor. This is clearly related to the altered view of the Olympian gods from the Hellenistic age on and reflected elsewhere in Palladas’s poetry.\textsuperscript{26} This is all ‘proof’ of the conclusion in the final couplet: men and women are incompatible even when they are most intimate, and even when they are gods. The unattainable ideal of harmony is expressed in συμφώνος, a metaphor from music.

Palladas wrote a variation on this theme in another epigram:

\begin{verbatim}
ο Ζεύς ἀντὶ πυρὸς πῦρ ὄπασεν ἄλλο, γυναῖκας.
εἰδε δὲ μήτε γυνὴ, μήτε τὸ πῦρ ἐφάνη.
πῦρ μὲν δὴ παχέως καὶ σμένυται: ἢ δὲ γυνὴ πῦρ
ἀπεβεστον, φλογερὸν, πάντοτ’ ἀναπτόμευον.
\end{verbatim}

Zeus, instead of fire, granted another fire, women.
If only neither woman nor fire had appeared!
Now fire is quickly extinguished, but woman is a fire unquenchable, blazing, always burning.

(9.167)

In these lines man has been given both woman and fire; both are destructive, but fire at least can be extinguished. The conceit is put across with balancing (ἀντὶ πυρὸς πῦρ ... ἄλλο, γυναῖκας), an impossible wish (εἰδε δὲ μήτε γυνὴ, μήτε τὸ πῦρ ἐφάνη), antithesis (πῦρ μὲν δὴ παχέως καὶ σμένυται: ἢ δὲ γυνὴ ... ) and an increasing tricolon (ἀπεβεστον, φλογερὸν, πάντοτ’).

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{23} Eur. \textit{Aek}. 203; Thuc. 2.49.
\bibitem{24} Sophron 54 connects ageing and withering: γῆρας ὧμε Μαραθίνον ταρχεῖει (‘withered old-age embalms us’).
\bibitem{25} For example, \textit{I}. 1.517-21, 536-611; the final phrase of this passage ends with χρυσόθρονος Ἡρη (611), echoed here by Palladas.
\bibitem{26} See above3; cf. also Alpheus of Mytilene, \textit{AP} 9.526.
\end{thebibliography}
The literary skill is unmistakable, the argument clever, but the thought is neither profound nor original. Archilochus, a millennium earlier in the 7th century BCE, described a woman as holding water in one hand and fire in the other, the former quenching and life-giving, the latter consuming and destructive. Admittedly, Archilochus is referring to a particular woman who has a dual nature, but the seed of Palladas’s idea is still there.

In addition to myth, Palladas also cites Homer as a higher authority to confirm his view:

πάνων ὁμερος ἐδείξε κακὴν σφαλερὴν τε γυναῖκα, σώφρονα καὶ πόρην, ἀμφότερα δλέθρουν. ἐκ γὰρ τῆς Ἐλένης μουχευσμένης φῶνος ἀνδρῶν, καὶ διὰ σωφροσύνην Πηνελόπης δάνατοι.

'Ἡλίας οὗ τὸ πόνημα μιὰς χάρυν ἐστὶ γυναῖκος' ἀυτὰρ Ὀδυσσείη Πηνελόπη πρόφασις.

Homer showed that every woman is bad and dangerous, chaste and harlot, both are destruction.

For from Helen’s adultery came the slaughter of men, and through Penelope’s chastity deaths.

The labour of the Iliad is due to one woman, and Penelope was the cause of the Odyssey.

(9.166)

Women are a bane, whether chaste or unchaste, Helen being an example of the latter, Penelope of the former. Both caused men to die, in battle on the plains of Troy or at the hands of Odysseus in the palace halls of Ithaca, or to suffer like Odysseus during his return. To enforce his argument, the poet makes use of chiasmus (σώφρονα καὶ πόρην ... Ἐλένης ... καὶ ... Πηνελόπης), the not unusual metaphorical use of σφαλερός of a dangerous person, the special application of σώφρονα and σωφροσύνην to female chastity, the epic and tragic colouring of δλέθρουν, and the accumulation of words with negative connotations (κακὴν σφαλερὴν τε, δλέθρουν, μουχευσμένης, φῶνος, δάνατοι, πόνημα). There may be conscious ambiguity in

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27 The so-called ‘Gesetz der wachsenden Glieder’ found elsewhere in Palladas’s poetry; cf. 10.99.4 and Henderson 2008a:103. For other examples, see Gerber 2003:193-94. For the device see Schwzyzer & Debrunner 1950:691.
28 Archil. Fr. 184 West.
29 Hdt. 3.53 and Eur. Suppl. 508 use σφαλερός metaphorically of ‘slippery’ or ‘perilous’ rulers; Thuc. 4.62 of the uncertain future; Nic. Al. 189 and Demosth. 1.7 of unreliable, wavering persons. See LSJ and TGL (ed. Stephanus) s.v.
30 Hom. II. 11.174; 10.174; Od. 4.489; 23.79; Soph. OT 430.
πόνημα (‘work done’), which could refer to Odysseus’s labour and suffering, or to the work involved in writing the *Iliad*. In the latter case, we have a reference within the text to what Kathryn Gutzwiller has called the conscious ‘writtenness’ first found among Hellenistic writers.

Of course, the thinking is simplistic and naïve. Palladas’s version of what Homer showed (ἐδειξε) is highly reductionist and skewed, especially with regard to Penelope. She is not portrayed in Homer as the cause of the deaths of the suitors (in fact, she arranges the archery contest at the instigation of Athena), nor does Odysseus blame his travails on his wife (in fact, his longing and concern for her are no less than for his father and son). The portrait of Penelope in post-Homeric literature and art sustains this view of her. We can only conclude that Palladas has forced his own, minority opinion on the reader. Whether he was expressing his real views or composing a witty epigram to meet the expectations of his readers is an open question.

The following epigram is more complex and interesting:

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\text{ἀν πάνω κομπάξης προστάγμασι, μὴ ὑπακούειν τῆς γαμετῆς, ληπίς· οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρυός εἶ, οὐδ' ἀπὸ πέτρας, φησίν· ὅ δέ ὁ πολλοὶ κατ' ἀνάγκην πάσχομεν, ἢ πάντες, καὶ αὐτὶ γυναίκορατη. εἰ δ' ὦ σαυπαλίω, φῆς, τύπτομαι, οὐδ', ἀκολάστον οὔσης μοι γαμετῆς· χρῆ με μύσαντα φέρειν, δουλεύειν σε λέγω μετρίωτερον, εἰ γε πέπρασαι σώφρονι δεσποτήν μηδὲ λίαν χαλέπη.}
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If you brag that you don’t in any way listen to your wife’s orders, you’re a fool; you’re not made of oak or of stone, as they say. What most or all of us of necessity suffer, you too suffer — being ruled by a woman.

But if you say ‘I’m not slapped with a sandal, nor is my wife licentious, nor must I bear her with eyes closed,’

I say your servitude is milder, since you’ve surely been sold to a chaste and not too unbearable mistress.

(10.55)

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31 See LSJ and TGL s.v.
34 *Od.* 5.209-10 (Callipso’s comment); 7.151-52 (dear ones in general); 9.34-36 (parents only); 11.174-79 (begging Teiresias for news of his father, son and wife); 13.42-43 (wife and dear ones); 329-38 (Athena’s comment, though he still wants to test Penelope).
35 Cf. Schmidt 1965:1903-08 (in later literature) and 1912-20 (in art).
Two male voices are presented: a man (A) who boasts that he does not listen
to his wife (1-2a), and a man (B) who claims that he is not bullied by his wife
who is faithful and attractive (5-6). Both are commented upon: A is deluding
himself, is not as tough as he claims and is in fact dominated by his wife like
all or most men (2b-4); B's situation is better, but it is still one of subservience
(7-8).

The epigram is enlivened by several stylistic features: the antithesis of the
two voices representing two situations men find themselves in; the use of
direct speech to add to the dramatic effect; the humorous treatment (at least
for the contemporary reader); the Homeric echo in the saying that a person
is not made of oak or stone; the rare and late-Classical word γυναικοκρατής;
and the terminology of slavery applied to married men (δουλεύειν ... πέτρασαι ... δεσποινή μηδὲ
λιαν χαλεπῆ). This state of marital servitude is unavoidable (κατ' άνάγκην,
3) and men have been 'sold into slavery' (πέτρασαι). It is possible that
πέτρασαι is reflexive: 'you have sold yourself into slavery', in which case
married men’s suffering is self-inflicted. The word δεσποινα is used of
goddesses, royal women, a wife or the lady of the house or mistress of a
slave. Its close proximity to δουλεύειν ... πέτρασαι indicates that that is
the sense here. A touch of humour is added at the end of the line: 'though
not too bad.'

This time the thought engages the reader as it unfolds. Rather than being a
condemnation of women, it is an analysis and critique of male perspectives.
Men are the direct target of the poet’s psogos. Though women are portrayed
as dominating, some credit, admittedly condescending and grudging, is given
them in lines 5-6 (not all are slippery-slapers, unfaithful or unsightly); and the
attribution of σώφρενα stands out in contrast to its employment twice in
9.166 above.

The longest of Palladás’s surviving epigrams happens to be on women,
strongly suggesting the importance of the topic in his mind.

36 Hom. Od. 19.163, where it is already proverbial (Penelope to the disguised
Odysseus): οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρύιν ἐστὶ παλαίφατος, οὐδὲ ἀπὸ πέτρας.
37 Though common in prose, the word does not seem to have been used in poetry;
cf. LSJ, TGL and Lampe 1961-68: s.v. πρόσταξις.
38 Cf. LSJ s.v. γυναικοκρατήσαι. Cf. also γυναικοκρασία, which refers to female
temper and bossiness (LSJ, TGL).
39 Aesch. Fr. 388; Soph. ΕΠ. 626; Plato, Λε. 796b.
40 Pind. Pyth. 4.11; Fr. 122.17.
41 Hom. Od. 14.127 (Penelope); 3.403 (Nestor’s wife); Diod. 2.45; Plat. Mor. 755c;
POxy 49.4.
There is no evident indication of chastity; this I tell husbands who’ve been fooled.
Unattractiveness is not quite beyond suspicion, nor is every pretty woman born unchaste.

For a woman doesn’t just follow those who pay much for her beauty; but it is possible to see many not so good-looking women insatiably sleeping with men, and granting many favours to those who used them.

Nor if a woman knits her brows and does not seem to laugh, and avoids showing herself to men, is this a sure sign of chastity. In fact, one may find altogether the gravest secretly to be wanton, and the merry ones who are friendly to everyone, chaste, if any woman can be entirely chaste.

Is this to be judged by age, then? But not even age has respite from Aphrodite’s frenzies.
So we trust in oaths and religion; but after the oath she can seek twelve gods – newer ones.

The poet sets out the dilemma facing men and husbands: how to determine a woman’s faithfulness (1-2). Four ‘signs’ are examined. Physical appearance is no guide, since an unattractive woman cannot be trusted not to stray, while an attractive woman, who is by nature chaste, will remain so even if offered money (3-8). Behaviour such as frowning, a serious demeanour or being secluded is also no guaranteed indication, for the most serious of women can
be wanton and the most cheerful chaste (9-14). Age, too, is no sure indicator: older women are still prone to Aphrodite’s influence (15-16). Finally, men resort to religious oaths, but these are also not fool-proof as a woman can approach twelve newer gods (17-18).

The poet professes to advise men, especially those who have been made a fool of (τοῖς ἐμπαιζόμενοις ἀνδραῖς, 2), but also includes himself among them (17). His argument is ordered and systematic. The basic strategy is one of anticlimax and antithesis: each time a new criterion for judging a woman’s faithfulness is proposed (looks, demeanour, age and religious oath), it is demolished. The language is unremarkable; most of the words are quite common. A few are, however, of interest. We notice again the use of ἀκορέστως for chastity (1, 11, 14). The use of ὃπωμένας, common in the active of men getting married, or in the passive of women marrying, here has the later meaning of ‘sleep with a man’ (as in Arist. EN 1148b32). The adverbial use of ἀκορέστως is first recorded here.42 The neuter plural μορχλάδα used of lewd women is rare.43 There is only one image in the poem, namely ὄστρω (16), an ancient image of the sting of the gadfly, but it seems to have already been weakened to mean ‘ordeals’.

To solve the crux in line 18, Paton 1963:33 n. 1 suggested κανονότερος and explained: ‘After swearing by the old twelve gods, she can get twelve new gods to forgive her for perjury’ – i.e. ‘become a Christian and conciliate the Apostles.’ The textual reading seems acceptable, but the interpretation of ‘the twelve gods’ as the Apostles is strained; Christians would hardly regard these men as gods. Palladas may be mocking the Christians, but it is still unlikely that the wife would convert to Christianity and swear the new oath to one or all of the Apostles. Twelve other, pagan (Greek or Egyptian) gods may be intended. Beckby (1968:826) refers to two lines from the comic poet Euphron (Fr. 6 Kock III): κανονός πορίζων πρὸς με πρὸς θεῶν θεοῦς / ἵνα τοὺς παλαιὸς μή πικρίς πολλάκις (‘bring me new gods from the gods / so you don’t swear falsely by the old ones so often’). In these lines the ‘new’ gods are to be selected from the (traditional?) pantheon. One detects in πρὸς με πρὸς θεῶν θεοῦς and the alliteration on π in a mocking tone in accord with the comic context and similar to that in Palladas’s line. It seems, then, that Palladas did not have any specific gods or religion in mind; instead, he derides the woman who swears fidelity by one set of gods, breaks her oath and then swears another one by some other gods.

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42 Cf. TGL, Lampe 1961-68: s.v.
43 It occurs elsewhere in the Palatine Anthology, where Paulus Silentiarius (9.443) uses the word with ἔλπις.
The target audience is clearly men and the problem raised is one concerning men in their relationships with women. The basic assumption or belief is that women are deceitful and cannot be trusted. Although he acknowledges that beautiful or cheerful women need not be unchaste (4-6, 13-14), he does so grudgingly (14). However, in the following couplet he expresses a radically different thought:

γαστέρα μισήσει θεος καί βράχματα γαστρός·
εἶνεκα γὰρ τούτων σωφροσύνα.

May god hate the stomach and the stomach’s food,
for because of them chastity is undone.
(10.57)

The use of σωφροσύνα makes it certain that female chastity is meant; Palladas is laying a curse on poverty and hunger as a cause of the loss of chastity.

A harsher tone and more stilted attitude are found in another epigram:

οὐδὲν γυναικὸς χείρον, οὐδὲ τῆς καλῆς·
δοῦλον ἀθείρον, οὐδὲ τοῦ καλοῦ·
χρήσεις ὅμως οὑν τῶν ἀνθρώπων κακῶν·
ἐὖνοις νομίζεις δοῦλον εἶναι δεσπότης;
καλὸς δὲ ἄν εἴη δοῦλος ὅ τὰ σκέλη κλάσεις.

‘Nothing is worse than a woman, even a good one.’
Nothing is worse than a slave, even a good one.
Nevertheless, you need necessary evils.
Do you think a slave has affection for his master?
A good slave would be one who broke both legs.
(11.286)

This epigram has been discussed elsewhere, so only a few remarks will suffice here. The first thing one notices is that the epigram is written in iambic metre, the metre of censure (ὑγος). Next, Palladas quotes the comic poet Menander and then expands on it: a slave is worse than a woman, but they are both necessary evils. Palladas adds very little to the conventional theme and the extent of his negative attitude can be judged by comparison with that other critic of women, Semonides. In Fr. 6 West, the latter, echoing Hesiod (Op. 702-03), wrote:

45 See Lloyd-Jones 1975.
a man carries off no booty better than a good wife, nothing more chilling than a bad one.

In another iambic epigram the tone and content are more effective:

He who is cursed with an ugly wife, when he lights the lamps in the evening, sees darkness.

(11.287)

The poet regards an ugly woman as a curse, since, even when her husband lights the lamps at night, he still sees darkness. The intended male readers would have found this witty and funny and might have enjoyed the unusual use of language (the construction of διόστυχων with the accusative; the adjective διόμορφου applied to a woman).46

The full force of iambic psogos is apparent in the following epigram:

Every woman is bile; but she has two good times, one in the bridal chamber, one in death.

(11.381)

This is a variation on a poem by the vitriolic iambic poet Hipponax (c. 550 BCE), nine centuries before Palladas:

Two days of a woman's life are sweetest:
when she gets married and when she's carried out dead.

(Fr. 68)

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46 See further Henderson 2006b:130.
The repetition of this notion over such a time-span and with little variation indicates that it was considered witty by the intended audience and reflects the persistence of male attitudes to women.47

Another epigram focuses on a particular woman or type of woman:

`...`

Even if after Alexandria you leave for Antioch, and after Syria arrive in Italy, no powerful man will marry you; for ever hoping for this, you leap from city to city.

(11.306)

The words are addressed to a woman who evidently hopes to marry well and travels widely to realise this hope. Her eagerness (or desperation?) drives her to 'leap from city to city' (πηδᾶς εἰς πόλιν ἐκ πόλεως). However, she seems to be of sufficiently elevated class and status to be able to undertake these journeys and to aspire to finding a husband from among powerful men. But then why does the poet think she has no hope of success? Is she, perhaps as a courtesan, aiming too high? Are her looks or age perhaps the drawback? Or is the poet, rejected and jealous, like the Roman elegiac poets before him, using this argument as a strategem to gain the woman's favour? And is she real or imaginary? The text provides no definite answers to these questions. What does emerge is his scorn for her constant attempt (her 'leaping' from place to place) to marry for power and wealth.

The next epigram sounds a personal note:

γηραλέων με γυναίκας ἀποκάττομαι, λέγουσαι εἰς τὰ κάτωπτραν ὅριαν λείψανοι ἡλικίας.

ἀλλ’ ἔγω εἰ λευκὰς φορέω τρίχας, εἰς μελαίνας,

οὐκ ἀλέγω, μιτὸν πρὸς τέλος ἐρχόμενος.

εὔοδοιος δὲ μύροι καὶ εὐπταῖοι στεφάνοι καὶ Βρομίῳ παῦ φρουτίδας ἀργαλέας.

Women jeer at me for being old; telling me to look in the mirror at my life's remnant. But whether I have white hair, or black,

I don't care, approaching my life's end.

With sweet-scented oils and lovely-leaved garlands

47 Cf. also Hippon. fr. 182 (possibly spurious). For further discussion, see Henderson 2008b:130-31.
and Bacchus I end painful thoughts.

(11.54)

Each couplet states an aspect of the theme: the mockery of his age by women, his indifference to their jibes, his consolation in the symposium. The thought and diction are simple and direct, yet effective. The epigram is framed by contrasting ideas: the jeers of the women (1-2) and the joys of the banquet (5-6). The women’s mockery is prosaic: ἀποσκόπτονσι in this meaning is not recorded in surviving Greek poetry48 and the jingle-effect (in sound and rhythm) of ἀποσκόπτονσι, λέγουσι suggests the repetitiveness of the jibes. In contrast, the terminology of the symposium is richly poetic in sound and meaning.49 Through this antithetical structure old age and its effects weave a lineal path: γηραλέον (1), the first word; λέγων (2), a word with tragic overtones;50 λευκᾶς ... τρίχας (3), βιότου πρὸς τέλος ἐρχόμενος (4) and φροντίδας ἀργαλέας at the end (6). One is left wondering whether the poet really is unconcerned about approaching age: the first and last words of the epigram refer to age (γηραλέον) and its effects (φροντίδας ἀργαλέας).

On his wife

Three epigrams deal with his own wife and domestic situation. In both Palladas blames his unhappy marital state on his wife and career.

μὴν ὁ ὀφλομένην γαμετὴν ὁ ἁλὼς γεγόμηκα,  
καὶ παρὰ τῆς τέχνης μὴν δοῦν ἀρέσειν.  
ὁμοι ἢ ἵλιο πολύμην, ἔχουν διελεύων ἀνάγκην,  
tέχνης γραμματικῆς καὶ γαμετῆς μαχίμης.

Destructive wrath, that’s the wife I, wretch, have married,  
and in my profession I began with ‘wrath’.  
Alas, man of much wrath, fated to have double anger,  
of a grammarian’s craft and a warlike wife.

(9.168)

The reader immediately recognises the first words μὴν ὁ ὀφλομένην as the initial words of the first two lines of Homer’s Iliad (μὴν ... / ὀφλομένην).

48 Cf. LSJ and TGL s.v..
49 For εἴδομος (εἴδομος) cf. Pind. Fr. 75.15 (of Spring), Eur. Ba. 235 (of myrrh) and Theoc. 3.23 (of celery) and 17.29 (of nectar); for εὐπήταλος cf. Pind. Parth. 2.69 (of the laurel); Aristoph. Thb. 1000 (ofivy) and Meleager, AP 4.1.19 (of the poplar).
50 Eur. El. 554; Tr. 716; Fr. 469; Soph. El. 1113; also Meleager, AP 7.476.
The poet thus compares his wife’s wrath with that of Achilles. In the next line he states that he also started his career as a *grammatikos* ‘from wrath’ in Homer’s epic. Violent anger in both wife and work therefore makes his life a misery. He is doomed by two manifestations of anger, that of his career and that of his wife. The wit is enhanced by the pseudo-heroic, possibly coined words πολύμηνις and διχόλων (or τριχόλων) which occur only here (notice the sound-play on οὐλομένην and πολύμηνις), and by the final word μαχίμης which is used elsewhere of men.

The second epigram elaborates on this theme:

\[\text{I am unable to endure a wife and grammar,} \]
\[\text{grammar unpaid and wife unjust.} \]
\[\text{The sufferings shaped by both are death and fate.} \]
\[\text{In fact, I've now hardly escaped grammar;} \]
\[\text{but I can't retreat from the man-fighting bed-mate,} \]
\[\text{for contract and Roman law prevent it.} \]
\[11.378\]

Grammar and wife together are too much to endure, the former poorly paid, the latter unfair (1-2, with parallelism and balancing). Even retirement from teaching literature has brought no respite: his wife is as belligerent as ever (ἀνδρομάχης, with punning on Ἀνδρομάχης?), and he cannot divorce her (3-6).

The autobiographical nature of the two epigrams is evident, but the skillful use of language and the witty ideas in both epigrams seduce the reader into not taking the content too seriously. 51

In another epigram Palladas also offers a glimpse of his domestic life:

\[\text{I'm not extravagant, but still I also rear} \]
\[\text{children, a wife, a slave, birds, a dog.} \]

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51 Thus Peek 1965:159.
The picture is not one of violence and unhappiness, but of poverty and patriarchal control. The hierarchy descends from the children to the dog, with the wife in second position between children and the slave.52 These attitudes may be witty, misogynistic cant, but we should not overlook the harsh realities of the lives of the poorer classes. Lucilius (c. 1st century CE) also used the epigram to argue that once a wife entered a house, everything in life changed for the worse and was further complicated by the arrival of children. A rich man could remain unmarried and still have children – presumably by adoption –,53 but a poor man could not love a child (AP 11.388). Early Greek elegy was written by and for aristocrats, and Hellenistic epigram was generally written by Greek expatriots for their Ptolemaic patrons. Palladas uses a persona who speaks for and as someone from the poorer section of Alexandrian society.

Conclusion

In his epigrams an embittered Palladas railed against most events, people, things and circumstances that surrounded or affected him. In his epigrams on women his attitude to them is also negative. In his eyes they are destructive, deceptive, incompatible with men, a necessary evil and desperate to marry rich and powerful men (9.165; 10.56; 11.286, 306). The degree to which these views were part of a deliberate literary pose or intensely personal utterances, both via a persona, can be endlessly debated, without a definite result. In one poem Palladas is simply perpetuating an ancient statement by Hipponax (11.381); in another he seems to be stating a personal or at least minority view (9.166). Attitudes to women and the role of women in the society of Alexandria had been changing since Hellenistic times,54 but there is no sign of this in his epigrams. This becomes apparent when one examines the themes and attitudes of the other poets of the Anthology. The modern reader finds his ideas simplistic and naïve rather than profound or original, but it is very likely that the original audience for whom he wrote, the

Greek male intelligentsia in Alexandria, would have accepted, appreciated and applauded his assessment of women.

But there is something we can judge more positively and that is his use of language. This is evident in every epigram, where we encounter myth, metaphor, structural features (balancing, antithesis, chiasmus, anticlimax), effective diction (color epic, unusual or unique words), humor and wit, dramatic effects. These stylistic devices are put to best use in his more personal epigrams on his domestic life (9.168; 10.86; 11.378) and his experience of growing old (11.54), where he subjects himself and his own situation to the same scrutiny as in the case of other people. His depiction of his marriage to a belligerent wife, made worse by his impoverished position, may even elicit a modicum of sympathy from the modern reader.

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