

In 1565 Johannes Posselius, Professor of Greek at Rostock University, published the *Epitaphia clarorum et piorum aliquot hominum, qui anno MDLXV peste in urbe Rostochio inclementissime grassante, placide mortem obierunt*. The booklet is thirty pages long, dedicated to a member of the Danish royal court, and provided with an explanatory letter introducing the collection of twenty-two funeral poems. All but one of the poems are composed in elegiac couplets; the final poem is written in sapphic stanzas and is clearly meant to stand as a conclusion to the collection.

The poems were composed in Classical Greek. During the sixteenth century, Greek was not unknown as a medium for funeral verse; but it certainly was not as mainstream among readers and writers with a humanistic education as was Latin. Such humanist elegies and epitaphs constituted by the middle of the century a distinct subgenre of Neo-Latin occasional poetry. An examination of several Latin funeral epitaphs and elegies by Eobanus Hessus, David Chytraeus, and Theodore Beza demonstrates the qualities and the particular uses of this funeral verse. Such an examination will also demonstrate the new and particularly Lutheran direction Posselius is taking in his Greek epitaphs.

Posselius had been publishing short topical poems in Greek from at least the early 1560s. The 1565 collection could not be more topical: the poems are epitaphs for individuals and their families – a number of them associated with Rostock University – who had been stricken down by a particularly virulent attack of plague in the Baltic region during this year. We have several Latin elegies for some of these plague victims produced by Rostock University faculty members, poems that provide an interesting contrast with Posselius'. For despite the circumstances of their production, Posselius' verses are meant to be read not as individual *Casualyrik* but as a collection and with a specific didactic purpose. The final sapphic ode caps the individual poems and provides a didactic conclusion to the booklet.

In composing these poems, collecting them and providing them with a conclusion, Posselius is creating a homiletic teaching-text related to a genre new to Lutheran poets and readers: the Funeral Booklet or *Leichenpredigt*. Recent studies by Cornelia Niekus Moore (*Patterned Lives; The Lutheran Funeral biography in Early Modern Germany*) and Anna Linton (*Poetry and Parental Bereavement in Early Modern Lutheran Germany*) describe these collections of prose memorials and poetic *epicedia*, intended to function both as exempla and as *artes moriendi* for the bereaved family member and the general reader alike. Posselius is making a peculiarly personal contribution to the Lutheran funeral booklet in his 1565 collection. He maintains the funeral booklet's homiletic aims of comforting the bereaved and celebrating a death in God. But he enhances the aesthetic appeal of the poems by creating resonances between the Lutheran concept of a good death and the ancient concept of death with ἀρετή.