Celebratory epigrams from Hellenistic Delos: A first survey of the epigraphic testimonies

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Introduction

Delos, part of the Cyclades archipelago, [1] is one of the main archaeological sites in Greece. Its ancient name first attested around 800 BC in the southern Argolis, in terms of myth, religion, geography, and politics. In the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (dated around the 7th century BC), the island is described as a floating island, which, after the birth of the god, was finally anchored to the sea floor. According to Homer and Hesiod, [2] the first shrine of Apollo (and also of Artemis) was built on Delos—the so-called Pythion—but no trace of this second hall of the cult remains BC). The sanctuary, dedicated to the Ionian Apollo, was established well as a regional and inter-regional center. In 314 BC, the island became a free port, and the sanctuary was placed under the protection of Ptolemy Soter. He underwrote major development, and, in a mirror construction with population growth, and increasing commercial prosperity. The period of Delian independence lasted until 166 BC, when the Romans converted the site into a free port and, despite its decline, it continued to be an important religious and economic center for many years to come. [3]

Archaeological excavations have yielded many inscriptions, mainly published in Inscriptiones Graecae Insularum Maris Aegaei (IG XI and I² (IG XI), IG XII and Inscriptiones de Délos (ID). As pointed out by Constantinopoulou, [4] the epigraphic corpus of the Delian shrine is as diverse as the organization, institutions, and status that a small island continued to enjoy in the centuries to the extremely changing political, economic, and cultural scenarios. The epigraphic corpus of Delos, in fact, bears witnesses to the diverse ethnicities and the diverse dedicated to the Delian gods around the same, paramount, and relevance of the dedicants, as well as the occasion for the dedication. In prepositions and [5] maybe the sanctuary's inscriptions that have survived in light, only a handful in texts have been retrieved. This number fluctuates even smaller if we take into account the epigraphic corpus dedicated to the Delian gods, which amounts to around 80 BC, out of 700 inscriptions, only 25 are epigrams (just over 10%). The number of texts inscriptions slightly increases, to 31 epigrams, if we also extend our analysis to the epigrams coming from the second half of the second century BC to the end of the first century. [6] [7] These texts represent an interesting field of study, since they provide information on the Delian cultural and religious environment, the occasion for the dedication, and the historical context in which they were produced. Texts inscriptions are mostly anonymous, and the presence of the poet's name is exceptional. Some epigrams found in Delos have the poet's signature, or mention the poet's name within the text [8] but names are Apollonius of Kaystros (201/200), Antipater of Sidon (170/169), Philippos (170/169), Philippos (170/169), Philippos (180/168, 185/183 or 155/152), Amphis (207/206). [9] Some epigraphic epigrams, the author's name is not stated. However, these are poems commissioned by a patron for a particular occasion, so they were conceivably written by poet authors who moved from course to course, composing public epigrams. [10]

In this paper, my goal is to analyze the anonymous celebratory verse inscriptions from Hellenistic Delos. I will first provide a brief overview of the epigraphic corpus, considering the assumptions one have hardly been marked at all, with a few exceptions. A first survey of the characteristics of these compositions allows us to better understand the epigraphic poetry produced in Delos and to discuss what celebratory verse texts widely practiced there. Moreover, the study of these epigraphic texts composed by poed poem allows us to reflect on the concept of poem authorship.

The epigrams

This research explores epigraphic epigrams with the following characteristics: [11]

- Found in Delos and dated between the third and the first century BCE;
- Indicate evidence of authorship (an author is implied);
- Assess cultural composition, reflecting local norms or prominent personalities;
- Appear in elegiac couplets or hexameters (at least two lines).

A total of 10 epigrams satisfies these criteria. These texts belong to three different types: the largest group is that of dedications to the Delian deities (eight texts) and the smallest of epigrams concerns the dedication of statues celebrating notable individuals (four texts); the third and last group consists of agonistic dedications represented by elegiac dedications (four texts).

1) Dedicatory epigrams to the gods

The largest group of celebratory epigrams is the one with dedications to deities. These texts can be divided into two subgroups: the Delian deities made by magistrates at the end of their term of office and dedications by private individuals.

1. Dedicatory public epigrams to the gods from magistrates

- inscription 1 = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated ca. 300-250 BCE; found in the Prytaneion)
- inscription 2 = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated to the mid-third century BCE; found in the Artemis Chiloia)
- inscription 3 = SEG XXX, 1(1) = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated to the mid-third century BCE; n.a.)
- inscription 4 (poem + epigram) = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated to the mid-third century BCE; found in the Poros Area)

Even at a cursory inspection, it is possible to reflect on the historical value of this type of public verse inscriptions of this type, as they provide information on public offices and who held them. In addition, inscriptions 1 and 2 are crucial from a religious point of view, since they are the only texts that mention the Delian Apollo and the Delian Artemis (even, which were commissioned by private individuals, dedications of these two gods a number of intriguing features. They can all be dated to the same period and are formulaic in their structure as much as in their language. They present 1) the magistrate's name and/or his patronymic (1 = I. Τριφίλου, 2 = ἀνέθεκε [illegible] Ἀρτεμιδωρίου, 3 = Ἀρτεμίδωρος Ἀρτεμιδώρου, 4 = [illegible] Ἀρτεμιδώρου); 2) the name of a god that indicates his specific office (1 = Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀγυιάτει, 2 = Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀγυιάτει, 3 = Ἀπόλλωνι Ἀγυιάτει); 3) the verb of dedication (1 = ἀνέθεν, 2 = ἀνέθεκε, 3 = ἀνέθεκε, 4 = [illegible]); 4) the dedicated object (1 = ἀγάλματα, 2 = [illegible], 3 = [illegible], 4 = [illegible]). Even if the text is very fragmentary, the verb of dedication is the only one that is not attested in the other inscriptions, so it implies reference to the office of hypourgoi; 5) the dedicated to a god (1 = I. Τύπιος, 2 = ἀνέθεν, 3 = ἀν ρόδοις, 4 = [illegible]). Although the formulaic structure is quite rigid, it is possible to reflect on the variations that occur in the epigraphic corpus. The magistrate's name is not particularly interesting for their style or vocabulary, but they are useful from a historical point of view because they the magistrates' name. It is clear that these epigrams are intended to give greater prestige to monuments dedicated to the gods. The poet, like the stone cutter, is simply craftsman and produces a poem devoid of originality, using the extant verses.

2) Dedicatory epigrams by the gods from different people: [12]

- inscription 5 = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated to the third century BCE; found in the Sanctuary)
- inscription 6 = SEG XXX, 1(1) = IG XI,2 (+ I²) (dated to the third century BCE; found in the sacred area dedicated to Isis)
- inscription 7 = ID 2104 (dated after 166 BCE; n.a.)
- inscription 8 = ID 2105 (dated to the first century BCE; found in the shrine of the Dioscuri).

These poems in elegiac verse commissioned by private individuals for different occasions. The first, inscription 5, is a dedicatory poem to Dionysus and Ariadne and we can only derive a reference to a woman ξ ἀ[illegible] (line[illegible]). Inscription 7 is also a poem, this time addressed by a man ξ ἀ[illegible] to the god Pan who is the patron and healing of his wife. The text, damaged from verse 3, is engraved on a smaller base compared to the first two lines, and it is possible that the last two lines were added later as an addition. Inscription 6 and 8 are a different type: these are texts related to the offering of a statue respectively, to Heracles and the Dioscuri. Within this group of dedicatory epigrams the shrine, a lengthy epigram for the Dioscuri deserves special attention. It was engraved on a marble base at the beginning of the first century BCE, and is perfectly preserved.

τὸ τὲ κτίσμα κοσμήσαν θεραπὼν τὸ σῶμα ρυθμῶν μετεκτίσατο βωμὸν ἐν ἱερῷ Τιτάνων, ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ χρόνῳ κεκτισμένον ἐμπρήσαντες ἀνδρὸς ἄθεοι, ἄξιοι τιμωρίας, ἐν τῷ θεωρικῷ ἱερῷ κρύβδην ἐπιβουλεύσαντες ἀνδρὸς ἀθέου ἀνόσι

are engraved. The verse-inscriptions for prominent personalities and for celebrating deities appear to be more accurate in the *mise en page*, more elaborate in content, and richer in encomiastic motifs than the dedications by magistrates and *choregoi*, which instead show less care in the layout and a few presence of topoi and encomiastic formulas. The study of these compositions with their related monuments allows us not only to identify the man celebrated and his role in the society of the time, but also to imagine who may have commissioned the poems and why they did so. The other point concerns the poets responsible for the composition of these celebratory epigrams. The different types of celebratory epigrams analyzed allow us to observe some relevant features in terms of poetic authorship. The public dedications to gods by magistrates and the choregic dedications are extremely formulaic in their language and syntax: it is evident that these are modest compositions, devoid of any distinct poetic identity. We can assume that the poet who composed them was a real craftsman working on commission, with little wit or poetic creativity. The situation is slightly different when it comes to honorific epigrams by prominent personalities and dedicatory epigrams for gods. These verse-inscriptions differ from the previous ones because they are not formulaic in their style and poetic diction. Some of these compositions reach the extraordinary length of ten lines (*epigrammata longa*) and most of them contain a sophisticated lexicon and *topoi* typical of literary poetry (invocations of the *laudatus*, epithets of praise, rhetorical questions). Even though these texts are more original, the absence of the poet's signature does not allow us to hypothesize that any real form of poetic authorship is at work here. Beyond these differences, which evidently reflect the importance of the person celebrated, the occasion for the dedication to the gods, and the client's status, what clearly emerges is the central role and the hegemony of the political élites, who could thereby exercise and, at the same time, display their power.

I expect that further studies of these monuments and of the anonymous inscribed epigrams will improve our knowledge of Hellenistic Delos.

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Footnotes

[back] **1.** According to Strabo 10.5.1, the Cyclades islands took this name because they 'encircled' Delos; according to Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos* 16–22, because they 'danced around' Delos.

[back] **2.** Bruneau – Ducat 2005:182.

[back] **3.** For the history of Delos, see Constantakopoulou 2017.

[back] **4.** Constantakopoulou 2019:97.

[back] **5.** Jacquemin 1995:155–157. With regard only to dedications, the author also discusses the percentage of verse-inscriptions in relation to the overall number of inscriptions found at Delphi and Athens.

[back] **6.** Guarducci 1969:121 uses the adjective 'celebratory' with a general meaning, to refer to different types of dedications that include an offering. Following Guarducci, I will consider properly celebratory dedications to divinities (votive inscriptions) and dedications to living public figures (honorary inscriptions).

[back] **7.** See Peek 1941; Peek 1956–1957.

[back] **8.** Concerning signed epigrams, see Santin 2009.

[back] **9.** On these poets, see Robert 1973:472–478 (Apollonios of Karystos); Garulli 2012 (Antipater of Sidon and Antisthenes of Paphos); Manieri 2009:154–156 (Zenobios); Geffcken 1916:82 (Poplios).

[back] **10.** See Petrovic 2009:209; Cinalli 2015.

[back] **11.** In this paper, I do not consider the following epigrams because of their poor state of preservation: *IG* XI.4 1294, *ID* 60 (third century BCE); *ID* 2553, *ID* 2646 (between the third and the first century BCE): *ID* 2662 (first century BCE).

[back] **12.** For these epigrams, see Peek 1956–1957:567–568; for *ID* 2548, see note 19.

[back] **14.** Constantakopoulou 2019:97.

[back] **15.** Concerning signed honorific epigrams, see note 9.

[back] **16.** Dillon – Palmer Baltes 2013:234.

[back] **17.** Vial 2008:15.

[back] **22.** On the history of choregic dedications, see Guarducci 1969:177–189. For a focus on Delos, see Agelidis 2009:21–22.

[back] **23.** There were two types of agones the *agones chrematitai*, for which prizes were offered to the winners, and the *agones stephanitai*, where the prize was a *stephanos*. See Della Bona 2015.

[back] **24.** This verse-inscription is fragmentary but, nevertheless, it is possible to find some information about this choregic dedication.

[back] **25.** See Agelidis 2009:109–110.

[back] **27.** Garulli 2014:125.

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