

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I

*Archaic and classical Greek epigram:
an introduction**Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic*

I THE OBJECT OF INVESTIGATION

Early Greek epigrams have been widely neglected by classicists and, if studied at all, have rarely been analysed as literary texts, but rather for the historical information they convey. This stalemate partly results from the fact that access to the texts was restricted by numerous obstacles until the 1980s, when Peter Allan Hansen published the two volumes of *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* (Berlin and New York 1983/9). The impact of the *CEG* for any endeavour in Greek archaic and classical literature cannot be overestimated, since for the first time it was possible to gain a quick, precise and reliable overview of early Greek epigrams in stone.¹

Nevertheless, the early Greek epigram remained on the margins of classical scholarship for another two decades. No volume dedicated entirely to archaic and classical epigrams was published between the release of Reitzenstein's *Epigramm und Skolion: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der alexandrinischen Dichtung* in 1893 and the conference in 2005. Compared to the booming study of Hellenistic epigrams, which has been further boosted by the publication of the Milan papyrus *P.Mil. Vogl.* VIII 309 with its collection of epigrams ascribed to Posidippus,² there are only a few works

¹ Nowadays, Greek poems in stone are accessible not only in *CEG* volumes, but also in the recent and very useful five-volume collection of epigrams from the Greek East, *SGO*, edited by Reinhold Merkelbach and Reinhardt Stäuber (four volumes and a volume of indices). This is not to criticise Kaibel's contribution or Peek's momentous collections, though they are somewhat outdated, textually optimistic and, in terms of dating, not entirely reliable. Merkelbach/Stäuber vividly depict the problems presented by the nature of the task (*SGO* 1, Vorwort).

² Various approaches on aspects of contextualisation and literarisation of these epigrams can be found in the collections of essays edited by Acosta-Hughes/Kosmetatou/Baumbach 2004 and Gutzwiller 2005. For an extended bibliography on Posidippus see 'The New Posidippus' conference website <http://classics.uc.edu/posidippus/posbib.html>. Important contributions on the field of Hellenistic epigram were made by Tarán 1979, Bing 1995, Gutzwiller 1998 and in the collections of essays edited by Harder/Regtuit/Wakker 2002 and Bing/Bruss 2007.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 MANUEL BAUMBACH, ANDREJ PETROVIC AND IVANA PETROVIC

concentrating on the archaic and classical material.³ They mainly focus on the following four aspects:

- 1 the development of the epigrammatic genre in the late classical period in terms of its ongoing 'autonomisation';⁴
- 2 the influence of inscribed epigrams on the Hellenistic epigram;⁵
- 3 the link between epigram and rituals, which is the main focus of a forthcoming monograph by Joseph Day, whose articles on various aspects of archaic and classical epigram have shaped the scholarship in this field for the past three decades;
- 4 the epigrams of Simonides, which have been attracting significant scholarly attention in recent years: David Sider, whose previous work on Simonides and the Simonidean corpus is of great importance for the study of archaic and classical epigram, is producing a much-anticipated edition of the full corpus of *Simonidea* with Ettore Cingano;⁶ Richard Rawles is in the process of finishing a monograph dedicated to *Simonidea* as well;⁷ Luigi Bravi has recently published an important investigation of the textual tradition of the Simonidean epigrammatic corpus,⁸ and Andrej Petrovic has written a commentary on the inscribed epigrams attributed to Simonides.⁹

In spite of these developments in scholarship, there remain numerous gaps, which this volume seeks to fill. In particular, the volume discusses aspects of the birth and early development of the genre as well as aspects of the development and origin of the various epigrammatic subgenera;¹⁰ questions of epigrammatic voices;¹¹ early collections;¹² the political role of the epigram;¹³ the intermediality of the epigram;¹⁴ and the epigrammatic models and features which were subsequently developed in the Hellenistic 'book' epigram.¹⁵

³ The following works tackle the early Greek epigram: Lausberg 1982, Ecker 1990, Bruss 2005, Meyer 2005. Perhaps less known but still very useful remains Häusle 1979.

⁴ Tsagalis 2008.

⁵ See the four contributions to Brill's companion to Hellenistic epigram (Bing/Bruss 2007) by J. W. Day, 'Poems on stone: the inscribed antecedents of Hellenistic epigram', 29–48; A. Petrovic, 'Inscribed epigram in pre-Hellenistic literary sources', 49–68; A. Bettenworth, 'The mutual influence of inscribed and literary epigram', 69–95; and E. Bowie, 'From archaic elegy to Hellenistic sympotic epigrams?', 95–112.

⁶ Most recently: Sider 2006 and 2007.

⁷ *Simonides and Simonidea: a Study in Poetic Tradition* (forthcoming, Cambridge).

⁸ Bravi 2006. ⁹ Petrovic 2007a.

¹⁰ See Furley, Trümper, and Wachter and to some extent Schmitz in this volume.

¹¹ See Schmitz, Tueller, Vestrheim and Wachter in this volume.

¹² See Gutzwiller's contribution in this volume. ¹³ See Higbie, Keesling and Petrovic in this volume.

¹⁴ See Borg and Lorenz in this volume. ¹⁵ See Bowie, Bruss, Fantuzzi and Hunter in this volume.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Archaic and classical Greek epigram: an introduction*

3

This volume, then, seeks to analyse the epigrams from the bottom up. The contributors were asked to think about ways of approaching archaic and classical epigrams without the usual prejudice in favour of Hellenistic epigrams and to rethink well-established (but little questioned) basic premises and suppositions about the archaic and classical epigram.¹⁶ The contributions represent a range of disciplines such as classical archaeology, ancient history, epigraphy and Greek philology. They cover a wide variety of topics ranging from the ephrastic impulses in archaic Greek epigrams to a collection of epigrams on Greek heroes which can be seen as a forerunner of Hellenistic epigram collections. In terms of geographical scope, even though the emphasis remains on Attica due to the nature of the material, the reader will be taken on a journey from the shores of Sicily to central Greece, and further east to Asia Minor.¹⁷

II TRADITIONAL STRATEGIES OF INVESTIGATION

Perhaps ironically, and with few notable exceptions, the early Greek epigram has mostly been discussed as a predecessor of its more famous and certainly more esteemed Hellenistic descendant. In its judgment, modern scholarship has been strongly influenced by the long established view that the Greek epigram has developed from 'being bound to the practical function of explaining a votive offering or describing a dead person on a grave stone . . . to self contained poetry' in the Hellenistic period.¹⁸

With the exception of a few scholars, who stress aspects of writing and reading in early Greek epigrams and regard the epigram as the oldest genre of European literature (cf. Häusle 1979), there seems to exist a consensus that only after the epigram 'emancipated' itself from its objects and found its way into books did it become a *literary* genre. What are the reasons for this assumption and what was the epigram before?

¹⁶ For a general discussion on methodology and theoretical approaches to early epigrams, see Lorenz in this volume. For methodological issues in recent studies on epigram (esp. reader-response criticism and speech-act theory), cf. Meyer 2005: 1–23.

¹⁷ Of c. 890 epigrams collected in the *CEG* volumes (on collections of inscribed epigrams, see below, n.2), some 450 come from Attica (by the end of the fourth century BC). What aided the development of this kind of epigraphic or, rather, epigrammatic habit in Attica, is a matter of dispute: on whether there is interplay between democracy and its predecessors in Attica and the spread of epigrammatic habits, see Svenbro 1993; on external factors determining the shape and form of epigrams, see Bowie, Higbie and Wachter in this volume.

¹⁸ Cf. Gabathuler 1937: 1: 'Im Laufe des vierten vorchristlichen Jahrhunderts muss das Epigramm literarisch geworden sein. Es löste sich von seiner Zweckgebundenheit, eine Weihgabe zu erklären, auf einem Grabmal von einem Toten zu berichten oder wie es sonst als Aufschrift dienen konnte, und wurde zu einem eigenwertigen, selbstständigen Gedichte.'

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 – Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 MANUEL BAUMBACH, ANDREJ PETROVIC AND IVANA PETROVIC

As Anthony Raubitschek pointed out, early Greek epigrams represent an entity between poetry and document, which is not precisely definable: ‘Epigram is a metrical text inscribed on an object [Aufschrift] which is different both from a poem and from an inscription [Aufzeichnung]. Epigram has the same form as a poem, but it is different inasmuch as it is an inscription which is associated with a monument in a narrow and singular way, an inscription which came into being because of the monument and contains essential parts of its meaning. An epigram, when it is inscribed, is similar to an inscription [Aufzeichnung], but an inscription, unlike an epigram, does not make a direct reference to the material it is written upon, and it can be imagined separated from the material object on which it is inscribed.’¹⁹

Raubitschek represents the *communis opinio*, as he claims that early Greek epigram is similar to the poem, since it has a poetic form, but differs inasmuch as it is in an extraordinary manner connected with its object and was made – this is the crucial point – as an important part of the object. Thus, early Greek epigram seems to exist only because of the object. It is this informative, practical function of the epigram – ‘stamping’ the object and providing the reader with information pertaining to its origin or owner – that has played a decisive role in our perception of early epigram and has hindered understanding of its literary and aesthetic value. Thus, the interplay of the two ancient criteria for the judgment of poetry, *prodesse et delectare*, usefulness and artistic delight, have only rarely been taken into consideration when it comes to the literary assessment of archaic and classical Greek epigram. On the contrary: since it fails to be *l’art pour l’art* – art for art’s sake – it is usually viewed as mere ‘craft’. As such epigrams can have – as Gutzwiller has hinted at in her important study of early epigrammatic collections – ‘an aesthetic value like that of “craft to art”’,²⁰ this view emphasises the decorative function of inscribed epigrams rather than questions their literariness.

The currently dominant view that early Greek epigrams primarily do service to the objects they are inscribed on seems to be based largely on the following issues:

¹⁹ Raubitschek 1968b: 3: ‘Das Epigramm ist eine Aufschrift in metrischer Form, die sowohl von einem Gedicht wie von einer Aufzeichnung verschieden ist. Mit dem Gedicht hat das Epigramm die Form gemeinsam, unterscheidet sich aber von ihm dadurch dass es eine *Inschrift* ist die eng und einzigartig mit einem Denkmal verbunden ist, um dieses Denkmals willen geschaffen wurde und ein wesentlicher Teil dieses Denkmals ist. Als *Inschrift* ist ein Epigramm von einer Aufzeichnung nicht verschieden, doch unterscheidet es sich von ihr dadurch, dass die Aufzeichnung ohne direkten Bezug auf das Schreibmaterial steht von dem sie gelöst gedacht werden kann.’

²⁰ Gutzwiller 1998: 2 with n.4, borrowing the formulation from Friedländer.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Archaic and classical Greek epigram: an introduction*

5

1 'Natural selection' versus canonisation

Unlike other literary genres, such as historiography or drama, the epigram seems to have suffered from the very fact that so much of it is preserved: whereas in the case of literary genres like epic or drama the textual tradition also served as a filter of the quality and importance of texts, stones, regardless of Simonides' famous dictum,²¹ survive and preserve 'bad' and 'good', influential and marginal, private and public poetry alike. No Hellenistic editor or medieval monk, no *arbiter morum* or *elegantiae*, has imposed his judgment on this material. Rather, the survival or loss of Greek inscribed epigram was often dependent on factors such as climate, invaders' powers of destruction, and the inclination to reuse and recycle the stone. Some nine hundred quite reliably datable verse inscriptions survive from the period between 800 and 300 BC,²² with the numbers slowly but steadily increasing,²³ providing new and previously uncommented on material for investigation.

2 The formulaic character of inscribed Greek epigram

One consequence of the abundance of epigrammatic material is that our corpora indiscriminately house (and hide) true gems of inscribed epigrams next to 'highly formulaic' epigrams.²⁴ However, even if the history of early Greek epigram is in fact the history of a minor genre,²⁵ it is not the history of a trivial one. The fairly widespread notion that archaic and classical epigrams are formulaic almost to the point of triviality is problematic as well: what tends to be repeated in the epigrams are the generic markers of individual subgenres (dedicatory, sepulchral, and to a significantly lesser extent, epideictic/honorific).²⁶

²¹ Simonides, D.48: τίς κεν αἰνήσειε νόωι πρίσυνος Λίνδου ναέταν Κλεόβουλον, / ἀενάοις ποταμοῖσ' ἄνθεσσι τ' εἰαρινοῖς / αἰλίου τε φλογὶ χρυσέας τε σελάνας / καὶ θαλασσοαἰαίσι δῖναισ' ἄντι(α) θέντα μένος στάλας; / ἅπαντα γὰρ ἔστι θεῶν ἥσσω· λίθον δὲ / καὶ βρότεοι παλάμαι θραύοντι· μωροῦ φωτὸς ἄδε βούλα.

²² This number is based on Hansen's editions, and on the epigrams from the period found after the publication of the *CEG*. C. Gallavotti's monograph (Gallavotti 1979), in which he attempts to recognise the metrical structure of a number of inscriptions which were previously deemed prose texts, remains remarkable even if not entirely convincing.

²³ Even though the number of archaic and classical epigrams found recently is nowhere near to that of Hellenistic and later epigrams, some exciting finds have been published, such as the sixth-century BC sepulchral epigram from Ambracia (*SEG* 41.540). On this text see Day 2007: 30–1.

²⁴ The attempts systematically to analyse the formulae of archaic and classical epigrams are few in number and in need of updating; di Tillio 1969 and Lazzarini 1976 are the most detailed among these.

²⁵ As stressed and analysed by Marco Fantuzzi in this volume.

²⁶ On the epideictic subgenre see Lauxtermann 1998. If understood as a versified parallel of honorific inscriptions, the epideictic epigram is hardly in need of the same formulaic features the sepulchral and dedicatory had to possess.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 MANUEL BAUMBACH, ANDREJ PETROVIC AND IVANA PETROVIC

3 *Epigram and interdisciplinarity*

Verses inscribed in stone often remained in the shadow of the ‘great’ classical genres.²⁷ The lack of interest in archaic and classical epigram seems to be rooted in the nature of the material itself. Verse inscriptions belong to an intersection of philology, ancient history and archaeology which makes a comprehensive approach difficult for each of the disciplines on its own. They should, therefore, ideally present a challenge and a stimulus for collaboration between disciplines. In effect, they have often been considered and dealt with as marginal within the realm of each.²⁸

It is clear that a new approach towards archaic and classical Greek epigram is needed. This new approach will be successful only if it is no longer dominated by the parameters, assumptions and expectations developed from scholarly work on Hellenistic epigram. The fact that archaic and classical Greek epigrams are inscribed on certain objects does not reduce their readings to the informative function – one should at the very least leave room for an analysis of the various literary techniques and strategies employed to accomplish this function. Ultimately what is needed is an interdisciplinary approach: all traceable and definable contexts should be taken into account.

From this angle, contextualisation and literarisation are the two guiding concepts in approach to archaic and classical Greek epigrams in this volume.

Before introducing these concepts in detail, a few words on the terminology are necessary. Epigram as a literary or even cultural phenomenon is significantly older not only than its literary manifestation in the Hellenistic period; it is also older than the term we use to designate the genre. The first use of the term *epigramma*,²⁹ attested in Herodotus and

²⁷ Cf. Fantuzzi 2004: 288.

²⁸ For an up-to-date bibliography on Greek epigram, the reader should consult Bing/Bruss 2007.

²⁹ Even though it is commonly held that the term ἐπίγραμμα originally implied little more than an ‘inscription’, all the earliest attestations of the term show that it was used for *metrical* inscriptions. However, even the authors who know and use the term ἐπίγραμμα do not use it for every metrical inscription (cf. e.g. Hdt. 5.59), but predominantly for the elegiac ones (on this see Hansen 1978 and Wallace 1984). Puelma’s article offers the fullest discussion of the history of the term; cf. Puelma 1996: 123: ‘Dadurch nun, dass seit ältester Zeit die hauptsächlich auf Stein und Ton geprägten Merksprüche vornehmlich in mnemotechnisch günstiger Kurzform ... gestaltet waren, wurde die Begriffsgruppe ἐπιγράφειν/ἐπίγραμμα neben der Grundbedeutung “Inschrift, Aufschrift, Eintragung, Kennzeichen”, die sie immer behalten hat, von der Sonderbedeutung des monumentbezogenen Kurzgedichtes vorwiegend hexametrisch-elegischen Versmasses eingenommen.’ Cf. id. 1997; Gutzwiller 1998: 3 and 47–8; Rossi 2001: 3–4; Bing/Bruss 2007: 1–2.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Archaic and classical Greek epigram: an introduction*

7

Thucydides,³⁰ is at least three hundred years later than the first inscribed verses preserved.³¹

The term is also later than the first allusions to inscribed epigram found in other literary genres: one can plausibly argue that one should recognise the first reference to epigram as early as the *Iliad*;³² by the time of Pindar, the allusions to epigram seem to become more prominent;³³ in Sophocles and Euripides verse inscriptions are alluded to several times;³⁴ from Herodotus onwards, and throughout the classical period, references to and quotations of epigrams in various contexts become relatively widespread.³⁵

How this squares with assertions that the reception of the epigram was limited by its physical setting, that, when read, it was read by exceptional people,³⁶ and therefore had a rather limited impact on the public and cultural life of a polis, is an open question. It is obvious that the extension of epigram into other classical literary genres, which has been increasingly investigated and recognised in recent years, rekindles a debate which is more than a century old about the earliest collections of epigrams.³⁷ Our knowledge of pre-Hellenistic epigram collections, which is quite limited, is unlikely to be expanded without further finds on papyri. That said, it is necessary to be reminded that the first reliably attested collections of epigrams are known to come from the fourth century BC,³⁸ but the existence of fifth-century collections cannot be excluded simply because of the lack of information. Wade-Gery argued for the existence of such collections seventy years ago, and the latest studies on the Simonidean *Sylloge* and

³⁰ Cf. Hdt. 5.59–61; 7.228 and Thuc. 6.59.2.

³¹ On the 'pre-history' (i.e. early history) of the genre see Fantuzzi in Fantuzzi/Hunter 2002: 389–97, esp. on the Dipylon jug and Nestor's cup.

³² Cf. Homer *Il.* 7.73–93. ³³ Cf. Pindar *Nem.* 6.16–18 and Fenno 2003: 344–6.

³⁴ See e.g. Sophocles *Ai.* 845–51 and Di Marco 1997, as well as Euripides *Tr.* 1188–91.

³⁵ Herodotus quotes no fewer than eight verse inscriptions, but aside from historiography, epigrams are quoted also in drama, philosophy, and particularly in oratory. On epigram in pre-Hellenistic literary sources see Petrovic 2007b. A study of epigram in orators remains a desideratum.

³⁶ This is argued by Bing 2002: 39–66. Even though this is a discomforting assertion for the aficionados of archaic and classical epigram, it is, on the basis of the surviving evidence, difficult to recognise readers of epigram in pre-Hellenistic sources. On the other hand, the lack of direct testimony might be treacherous in this case, since some circumstantial indications might be taken to stress the importance of and care for epigram displayed by city states (therefore confirming their reception as well): at least two sixth-century verse inscriptions (*CEG* 430 on tyrannicides, with re-publication sometimes disputed; *CEG* 179, on the war between Athens against Boeotians and Chalcidians in 507/6) which were destroyed during the Persian invasion of Attica were republished in the aftermath of the Persian wars. This implies, if it does not confirm, the existence of copies. For the re-publication of the inscriptions see Chaniotis 1988.

³⁷ For an illuminating discussion of the *Syll.Sim.* see Sider 2007.

³⁸ For an overview of the extant evidence for the earliest collections cf. Cameron 1993: 400ff.; Argentieri 1998; Gutzwiller 1998: 20ff.; Parsons 2002: 115ff.; Petrovic 2007a: 92–8.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 MANUEL BAUMBACH, ANDREJ PETROVIC AND IVANA PETROVIC

epigrammatic collections are anything but disinclined to assume that epigrams were circulated in proto-anthologies in fifth-century Athens.³⁹

But even if we put the issue of early collections aside, it must be stressed that epigrams made a significant mark on the epigraphic landscape of the Athenian public space: in the epigraphically regulated environment of, say, the Athenian classical agora,⁴⁰ or even the acropolis, literate Athenians had an opportunity to read, and to read out to their fellow-citizens, verses which were sometimes monumentally inscribed, and whose red colouring attracted the attention of passers-by.

III A NEW APPROACH: CONTEXTUALISATION AND LITERARISATION

The issues of contextualisation and literarisation demarcate the two aims of the present volume: on the one hand, to contribute to a better understanding of the historical reception of Greek archaic and classical epigram and, on the other, to clarify the place of archaic and classical Greek epigram in the epigrammatic genre as well as its role in the genre's development from stone to book, which so far has been primarily regarded as a characteristic of the Hellenistic epigram.⁴¹ Both aspects help to shed more light on the possible intended impact (what Iser would call *Wirkungsintention*)⁴² of archaic and classical epigrams and thus widen our understanding of these texts in their generic as well as individual functions.⁴³

These two aims are reflected in the two parts of this volume. Part One contains papers concentrating on contextualisation: the 'meaning' of early Greek epigrams must be decoded to a certain extent from different contexts, which are in dialogue with the epigram.⁴⁴ The most prominent ones, which are focused on in the contributions to Part One of this volume, are the following:

³⁹ See Wade-Gery 1933: 82ff. and esp. 95 and Petrovic 2007a: 95 for a fifth-century epigrammatic collection; Sider 2007: 114 and 118–19 plausibly argues that Simonides organised a collection which included his epigrams.

⁴⁰ Thompson/Wycherley 1972.

⁴¹ On the transition of epigram 'from stone to book' cf. Gutzwiller 1998: 1–14 and *passim*; Fantuzzi in Fantuzzi/Hunter 2004: 283–349; Meyer 2005: 96–126.

⁴² On reader-response terminology used in this introduction cf. n. 53.

⁴³ On methodological issues concerning reader-response criticism see Meyer 2005: 1–23.

⁴⁴ On the system of communication in archaic to classical epigrams cf. the detailed and insightful analysis of Meyer 2005: 13–16 and *passim*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Archaic and classical Greek epigram: an introduction*

9

- (a) the dialogue between epigram and passer-by, whose *expectations as a reader* forms an important context;
- (b) the material or spatial context, as well as the aesthetic aspect of the medium an epigram was inscribed upon;
- (c) the religious context, especially in the case of dedicatory epigrams, which often seek to establish a connection between the object, dedicatory and deity and to memorialise the moment of dedication;
- (d) the historical and political context, and the reading of epigram as a representation of and a comment on specific historical events, or as a political statement;
- (e) the generic and literary context, exploring the influences of other literary genres on the epigram, as well as the development of early epigrammatic subgenres.⁴⁵

Part Two of the volume is dedicated to the issue of the literarisation of archaic and classical epigram. Literarisation is taken to denote the process by which the roles of reader and authors developed, as well as the intimations in archaic and classical epigram towards the narrative strategies and literary features employed by the Hellenistic epigram.⁴⁶ The contributions in Part Two concentrate not merely on the important notion of the transition ‘from stone to book’,⁴⁷ and the subsequent literarisation of the genre, but also on the key poetic practices which foreshadow the birth of the most prominent features of the genre. Hence, the contributors focus on the language and imagery of archaic and classical epigram as compared to that of the Hellenistic age;⁴⁸ on the art of variation;⁴⁹ and finally, on the art of description;⁵⁰ and taking a broad look on the narrative strategies employed in pre-Hellenistic epigram.⁵¹

IV CONTEXTUALISATION AND LITERARISATION: A STUDY OF THEIR INTERPLAY

When it comes to the construction of the ‘meaning’ of an epigram, two or more contexts have to be factored in; a reader (ancient as well as modern) is

⁴⁵ Contextualisation is thus understood as a multifaceted phenomenon, including the situation of the reception (‘the epigrammatic voice’), which is dealt with in chapters 2–4 by Schmitz, Tueller and Vestrheim; the physical and spatial context, which is focused on in chapters 5–7 by Borg, Keesling and Lorenz; the place of epigram within the realm of religion, which is discussed in chapters 8–9 by Furley and Trümper; the role of the epigram within its historical and political context (contributions by Higbie and Petrovic in chapters 10–11); and finally the place and dynamics of the subgenera within the umbrella category of ‘epigram’ (Gutzwiller and Wachter in chapters 12–13).

⁴⁶ Cf. Meyer 2005: 16.

⁴⁷ The expression is borrowed from Gutzwiller 1998.

⁴⁸ Hunter in this volume.

⁴⁹ Fantuzzi in this volume.

⁵⁰ Bruss in this volume.

⁵¹ Bowie in this volume.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11805-7 - Archaic and Classical Greek Epigram

Edited by Manuel Baumbach, Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic

Excerpt

[More information](#)

IO MANUEL BAUMBACH, ANDREJ PETROVIC AND IVANA PETROVIC

invited to create the epigram's 'meaning' by the act of contextualisation. This act of contextualisation can, on the one hand, focus on the historical background, i.e. the significance of epigrams for their historical readers.⁵² On the other, it can allow one to approach the epigrams as implied readers,⁵³ trying to realise the embedded intentions of the epigrams as texts by reading and interpreting them independently of their historical background. Both approaches are based on the assumption that inscribed epigrams as public objects constitute a kind of literary 'site of memory' (*Erinnerungsort*; *lieu de mémoire*), which contains specific information and intends to pass it on to as many readers as possible,⁵⁴ in principle unconstrained by time or space. To be capable of this, inscribed epigrams acquire aspects of their meaning from their context, which assists the reader in filling the gaps a short text has to leave, or from material or canonical contexts which ensure that the epigram's message will survive. Hence, the realisation of their meaning (what Iser and reader-response critics would call *Konkretisation*) is essentially always aesthetic, i.e. accomplished by the reader through contextualisation.⁵⁵ However, epigrams can also reduce their dependence on contexts to a minimum in order to be as self-sufficient as possible. In both cases, the passer-by is activated as reader: either to carry out the intended contextualisations through the act of reading, or to follow the epigram's claim to autarky by concentrating on the text itself. Any reader is – of course – free to contextualise an epigram in a way not intended by the text, and can thus add contexts and gain new meanings. This complex dialogue between text, context(s) and reader is never fixed: not only will every reader approach the text with his own expectations and contextual knowledge, but the contexts themselves are not stable and fixed either – they can develop, deform, or even get entirely lost in the course of time.

The epigrams themselves, the third corner in the hermeneutic triangle, are not entirely stable entities either: in some cases, they can be decontextualised, by, for instance, being rewritten on a different monument or included in a literary text.⁵⁶

⁵² For the act of contextualisation of epigrams, be it as an act of 'supplementation', or of 'Einbeziehung des Lesers' or of 'Ergänzungsspiel', see Meyer 2005 and Bing 1995.

⁵³ Cf. Iser 1994: 60–7. On this issue in the context of epigrams cf. Meyer 2005 and 2007: 187–210, esp. 190–2. English terms for Iser's terminology applied to epigrams are borrowed from Meyer 2007.

⁵⁴ On the aetiology of this cf. Meyer 1995: 226–8.

⁵⁵ On epigram and aesthetic objects see now Männlein-Robert 2007: 7–10 and 37–120 with the relevant scholarship. Reader-response theory distinguishes between artistic and aesthetic poles in a literary work: the former refers to the auctorial dimension, the latter to the realisation of the meaning by the reader.

⁵⁶ The best known case of decontextualisation and subsequent recontextualisation is the Athenian dedicatory epigram (Page *FGE* III) first inscribed in 507/506, destroyed by the Persians, and inscribed