

Beyond the Bookroll: Dialect Choice as a Poetic Device in Hellenistic
and Imperial Inscribed Epigram

In his thirteenth and final *Iamb*, Callimachus stages a debate between his poetic persona and an unnamed critic, who finds fault with Callimachus' foray into the iambographic tradition. Amongst the charges of poetic impropriety leveled at the poet by his critic is his use of dialectal variation—Ionic, Doric, and a 'mixed' (τὸ συμμίτκον) variety—in composing his iambographic collection. While artificial language has been a hallmark of Greek poetry since Homer, *Iamb* thirteen gestures to a contemporary discourse surrounding the conventions of dialectal use, particularly as it relates to genre. Not only in his *Iambi* does Callimachus parade a variety of dialects before his reader. Callimachus composed Doric hymns, and his elegiacs and epigrams incorporate epichoric vocabulary and Ionic and Doric features sometimes within this same line or poem. Callimachus, however, was not alone in his experimentation with the literary potential of dialect choice and mixture. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the selection, distribution, and mixture of dialect in Hellenistic book epigram are complex and meaningful components of a literary epigrammatist's presentation of her text. This is true for Alexandrians, such as Posidippus (Sens 2004), and later book epigrammatists, such as Antipater of Sidon at Rome and Meleager on Cos (Gutzwiller 2014; Coughlan 2016).

At the same time, it has become apparent that book epigram influenced the themes, style, and language of contemporary inscribed epigram (e.g. Bettenworth 2007; Garulli 2012; Ypsilanti 2017), a still under-studied corpus. In this paper, I explore the dialectal practices of Hellenistic and early imperial inscribed epigram. The orienting research question is one of continuity or difference: do the authors of inscribed epigram, often itinerant poets, treat dialectal choice and mixture in ways similar to or at odds with the tradition of book epigram, especially as

exemplified by Callimachus and Posidippus. The results of my research demonstrate an affinity between the treatment of dialect by book and inscribed epigrams. In book epigram, dialect was often employed to reinforce or suggest a particular ethnic or local identity for the epigrammatic subject, a practice borrowed from earlier inscribed epigram, whose dialectal coloring often accorded with the local dialect of site of the inscription's display (Mickey 1981). While this general practice continued into the Hellenistic and imperial periods, authors of inscribed epigrams also used association between dialect and place to signal a subject's cultural heritage. In an epigram celebrating the victory of Diotimos, the sufet of Sidon, at the Nemean games, the poet composed his verses in a marked Doric (*SGO* 20/14/01=Kaibel 932; ca. 220 BCE). Doric was not the dialect spoken in Hellenistic Sidon, which was the koine, and is thus conspicuous. I argue that the choice of Doric is meant to emphasize the mythical Argive origins of Sidon, referred to in the epigram (εἰς ἀγαθῶν οἶκον Ἀγηνοριδᾶν), and serves to present the freshly victorious Diotimos to his readers with an authenticizing stamp of Hellenicity. Dialectal choices also signal an epigram's literary heritage. Several epitaphs from various cities in Asia Minor feature the admixture of Doric forms (in otherwise un-Doricized contexts) in words related to mourning mothers, a pattern of linguistic choices likely designed to echo the lamentations of tragic choruses. There also is evidence of dialectal mixture within single inscriptions (cf. epitaph of Atthis of Knidos, *SGO* 01/01/07=*GVI* 1874). In most instances the distribution of these dialectal features do not create any discernable pattern of expression; rather the mixture alone functions as a marker of literariness, distinguishing the inscribed verses from their prosaic counterparts.

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