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Dialect variation in Hellenistic epigrams: reassessing Manuscript variants in Callimachus' epigrams through inscribed sources

The definition of the literary epigrams' dialect is addressed as a 'tiresome and insoluble problem' in the Gow-Page edition of the Palatine Anthology. This claim is due both to the manifest variety of dialect traits in literary epigrams and to the multiple manuscript variants in the Palatine and Planudean Anthology. Moreover, the absence of systematic studies on the language of Hellenistic inscribed epigrams increases the confusion on the matter.

In this paper I will show that a perspective on the interrelation of inscribed and literary epigrams can shed light to the issue of epigrammatic language. Specifically, I will argue that dialectal traits attested in inscribed epigrams can prove useful to choose between manuscript variants in literary epigrams of funerary type. The comparison can be of use especially in the case of authors active at the beginning of the Hellenistic age, when there was a higher interaction between literary and inscribed epigrams. As case-study, I will analyse the language of Callimachus' funerary epigrams and I will compare it with the inscribed epigrams of the area he came from, Cyrene, considering other Doric areas as well. In fact, Doric areas are a perfect tool for understanding language variation, since Doric dialects were the most resilient to Koine.

Doric, Attic-Ionic and Ionic colouring are attested in the funerary epigrams from Doric areas and epic-Ionic traits are in most of them. Moreover, an isolated Doric /a:/ or Ionic /ɛ:/ can be found in epigrams with Ionic or Doric vocalism respectively. In Callimachus' funerary epigrams manuscripts attest numerous *variae lectiones* exactly in the case of inherited /a:/ and other morphological Doric traits. While in the Gow-Page edition the choice of variants is made in the sake of the consistency of the language in each epigram, and language mixture is preserved 'unless there is only one aberrant form', I suggest to reconsider this principle in light of the mixed language attested in inscribed epigrams as well. I will conclude that the variants in the Palatine Anthology are generally preferable and that this case study shows that similar patterns of language variation can be traced both in 'Buch' and 'Stein' epigrams.

References

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