

Deixis and Frames of Reference in Dedicatory Epigrams. The use of a database with an interdisciplinary approach

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Abstract

This paper presents an example of a database designed to combine epigraphic, linguistic and philological data. This database is part of my project on a study of deictic expressions in dedicatory inscribed and literary epigrams. It includes the results of the analysis of around 600 dedicatory epigrams and it will be used to extract information on trends and recurrent patterns in the genre.

Keywords: Greek epigram, dedication, database, deixis, Hellenistic age

1. Introduction

For a long time, the study of the Greek epigrams has maintained a clear distinction between ‘epigraphic’ and ‘literary’ epigrams. This distinction, however, fails to understand the complexity and the development of this poetic genre. Only in very recent years have scholars started to highlight properly the important relationship between Hellenistic ‘literary’ epigrams and epigraphic models.¹

My PhD project follows this new exegetic line and contributes to our understanding of the inscriptional component of the Hellenistic epigram.² In particular, I focus on the use of deictic expressions in

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¹ The shift in the attitude towards the history of the epigrammatic genre is well resumed by (GARULLI, 2012, 5-34). For other work, which consider the importance of the dialogue between ‘epigraphic’ and ‘literary’ epigrams, see e.g. (MEYER, 2005), (TUELLER, 2008). On archaic and classical epigrams, see (BAUMBACH ET AL., 2010). Further bibliography in (BAUMBACH ET AL., 2010, 2).

² The project is developed within the frame of the C-1 group (‘Deixis and frame of reference’) of the Excellence Cluster TOPOI.

dedicatory epigrams, i.e. on the use of all those linguistic elements whose meaning and interpretation depend on the spatial and temporal context where they are uttered.³ The corpus analysed includes inscribed epigrams from the archaic epoch until the end of the 4th century BC, and the Hellenistic epigrams transmitted in the Greek Anthology or on papyrus. The reference editions used are (HANSEN, 1983, 1-2) for inscribed epigrams and (GOW AND PAGE, 1965) and (AUSTIN ET AL., 2002) for 'literary epigrams'.⁴

In order to deal with this heterogeneous material, I developed a database to register and organise the data obtained from the analysis of the texts. The specific aim of this database is the registration of all relevant linguistic features related to spatial, personal and temporal deixis. In addition to this, I put on record for each epigram other more generic elements, which are related to the dedicatory context, to the linguistic facies and, especially in the case of inscribed epigrams, to the historical and archaeological context. In this way, on the one hand, I can obtain a global picture of the whole corpus, which includes data found both in inscribed and literary epigrams. At the same time, I can keep and easily retrieve all the peculiar features related to each specific text in order to be able to deal with the material properly, without losing sight of their specificity. The possibility of managing at the same time these two levels - the whole corpus and the single text - is extremely valuable. In this regard, the database provides an essential support, since it helps work with complex material on those different levels that must be considered together, but are usually difficult to keep in focus at the same time.

2. Greek dedicatory epigrams and the role of deixis

In the Ancient Greek world it was customary to accompany a dedication to the gods with a – usually – short inscription. This was normally chiselled on the dedicated object (or on its support) and it recorded the main information related to the offering. The elements recurring in

³ For an overview of the concept of deixis see DIESSEL (2012, with further bibliography)). On deixis in Ancient Greek see e.g. FELSON (2004), EDMUNDS (2008) and (BONIFAZI, 2014).

⁴ For convenience, I will later on refer to this second group as 'literary epigrams'. The definition simply identifies those epigrams that are transmitted in the Greek Anthology or on papyrus and does not imply any value judgment.

such inscriptions were the name of the dedicator, the verb of dedication and the name of the god receiving the dedication.⁵ The most common and widespread formula for dedications contained exactly these three elements: ὁ δεῖνα ἀνέθηκε τῷ θεῷ. A frequent variation was ὁ δεῖνά με ἀνέθηκε τῷ θεῷ,⁶ where the speaker is the object itself, as is clear from the employment of the personal pronoun με. It is interesting to note that since their first examples the speaking object was a recurring feature in dedicatory epigrams and it is still frequent in the 4th century BC.⁷ Clearly, the basic scheme here presented could be varied by omitting some elements (as the name of the dedicator) or adding others (as the generic name of the object, like the recurrent ἄγαλμα).

A crucial moment in the evolution of the epigrammatic genre is the beginning of the Hellenistic era, when the genre becomes more and more popular and epigrams started to be circulated autonomously, no longer limited to one inscription alone.⁸ This development led to the composition of literary epigrams not intended for inscription, but which in some way maintained the illusion of a material inscription on a stone. The Hellenistic epigrammatists who worked with inscriptional type of epigrams (and among these dedicatory epigrams) retained the structure, style and traditions of the epigraphic models, yet the translation of these into a book context inevitably means that the communicative strategies employed until then had to be reinvented. The primary reason for such changes is self-evident: the monument intended for inscription and the space surrounding it do not exist anymore – they have to be imagined in the reader's mind.⁹

⁵ On archaic dedications, see [DAY \(2010, spec. 1-14\)](#) for an introduction to the genre.

⁶ The formula here presented (with its two variants) was identified by Maria Letizia Lazzarini, in her study on the formulas of archaic dedications [LAZZARINI \(1976, 58-60\)](#). Her analysis is based on both verse and prose inscriptions from the archaic age. However, such basic scheme, with these elements, was normal in epigrams as well and it remained substantially unchanged in classical and post-classical time.

⁷ On the topos of the speaking object, see [BURZACHECHI \(1962\)](#), [SVENBRO \(1988, 36-52\)](#), [TUELLER \(2008, 16-27\)](#), [FURLEY \(2010, 151-166\)](#), [WACHTER \(2010, 250-260\)](#), [CHRISTIAN \(2015, 29-107\)](#).

⁸ This trend may be linked to the custom prevalent in the 5th and 4th century BC to copy epigrams on monuments and then quote them in various texts. See [GUTZWILLER \(1998, 47ff.\)](#)

⁹ This involvement of the reader can be put in relation with what [BING \(1995\)](#) defines *Ergänzungsspiel*, i.e. with the process of supplementation of the text deliberately incited by Hellenistic epigrammatists.

This process of reinvention is particularly evident in dedicatory epigrams, which were traditionally chiselled on the dedicated object itself. In this case, the loss of the original context forces the author to re-elaborate traditional models, by adding some elements (e.g. the specific name of the dedicated object) that cannot be retrieved from the surrounding setting.

From a linguistic point of view, this re-elaboration has an impact in the texts on deictic expressions, which were typically used in inscriptions to lead the gaze of the reader towards the dedicated object. In this epigraphic context the deictic expressions point to something in front of reader's eyes (*deixis ad oculos*), whereas in a literary context the readers will have to imagine in their mind the invisible referents of deictic expressions (*deixis am Phantasma*).¹⁰ If on the one hand this change requires a particular attention to the verbal reconstruction of the setting, on the other hand, the loss of the material context allows the poet to play with different and new points of view and frames of reference.

The analysis of deictic expressions can help determine the deictic centre in dedicatory epigrams. The deictic centre, which normally coincides with the origin of the utterance, works as a point of reference for all deictic markers and expression.¹¹ In the case of dedicatory epigrams on stone, the deictic centre in spatial terms is generally understood to be in the place of the inscription itself, which in most cases is the dedicated object. In other words, for all deictic expressions that point to something close (such as the proximal *ὅδε* 'this here'¹²) the occasional reader will look for the referents in the space close to the inscription. In the evolution of the epigrammatic genre, the loss of the material context produces an important change, since the strong relation that connects the text with its object starts to fade. In other words, when the epigram is found in a book, the point of reference — or deictic centre — is not immediately clear to the reader, since it is not immediately clear the relation of the text with the spatial setting to which it refers. This means

¹⁰ The difference between *deixis ad oculos* and *deixis am Phantasma* was highlighted and described for the first time by Bühler in 1934, see BÜHLER (1982, 121-126, 133-135).

¹¹ See BÜHLER (1982, 102f.) and LEVINSON (1983, 63f.).

¹² 'Proximal' deictic elements are all those elements that refers to something that is close to the deictic centre: among these demonstrative pronouns or adverbs such as 'this' or 'here' and temporal adverbs such as 'now'. See DIESSEL (2012, 2408f.).

that the deictic centre is somehow released from its traditional location on the object and the poet is free to consider and bring to the text new, different points of view.

This progressive detachment of the text from its original physical location played a crucial role in the process that led, out of trivial verse inscriptions, to the emergence of the epigram as a full literary genre. Deictic expressions were traditionally employed in epigraphic contexts to strictly and clearly bind the text to its material support. Later on, only the possibility of the separation from a unique location allows the epigram to be circulated autonomously and reach a wider audience. In this passage, poets explore new uses of deictic markers in order to widen the possible references of their text.

My research will try to detect different trends in the use of deictic expressions in order to highlight the similarities and parallelisms between inscribed and literary epigrams and to elucidate the different deictic strategies employed in different contexts.

3. The database

In the first step of my research, the analysis of the texts is followed by the registration into a database of all the relevant data related to spatial, personal and temporal deixis. This database is conceived first of all as a tool to organise the data and make them available for the next steps of the research.

The corpus of epigrams analysed includes dedicatory verse-inscriptions collected in Hansen's *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca* [CEG 1-2], as for epigrams on stone. In this case, I selected those epigrams included by Hansen in the section "Tituli dedicatorii". For literary epigrams, I followed Gow's and Page's edition ([GOW AND PAGE, 1965](#)), to which I added the epigrams attributed to Posidippus and edited by Austin and Bastianini ([AUSTIN ET AL., 2002](#)). In this case, the selection was made according to the contents of the epigrams and I selected all those epigrams that have a clear dedicatory frame.

The structure of the database was designed to include all important data related to the text examined, in order to have for each epigram a complete profile, which includes linguistic, literary, historical and archaeological aspects.¹³ The data were organised in various tables,

¹³ The software used is FileMaker Pro 13.0v4.

which are all interconnected (See Fig. 1).

Alongside bibliographical and historical-archaeological information, the database records the data obtained by a first analysis of the form and of linguistic features of the epigram, such as verbal tenses, occurrences of demonstrative and personal pronouns (deixis); speaking subject and addressee (communicative_context); verb of dedication, standard name of the dedicated object (dedicatory_context). Such structure offers a balance between the need to record a detailed picture for each epigram analysed and the possibility of conducting research on single features within the whole corpus. Since each table contains a restricted amount of data (divided into coherent sections), it is easy to get a simple, clear picture of the recurrence of one specific feature (and its interconnection with other related aspects) within the corpus and to leave out information that is not immediately consistent with the research done. However, the fact that all the tables are interconnected enables the user to formulate queries that combine fields contained in different tables. In this way, for example, it is possible to look for the recurrence of a specific tense for the verb of dedication (in the table 'deixis') and to see if this is associated with the use of a specific verb of dedication (in the table 'dedicatory_context') or with a particular epoch (in the table 'archeological_context').

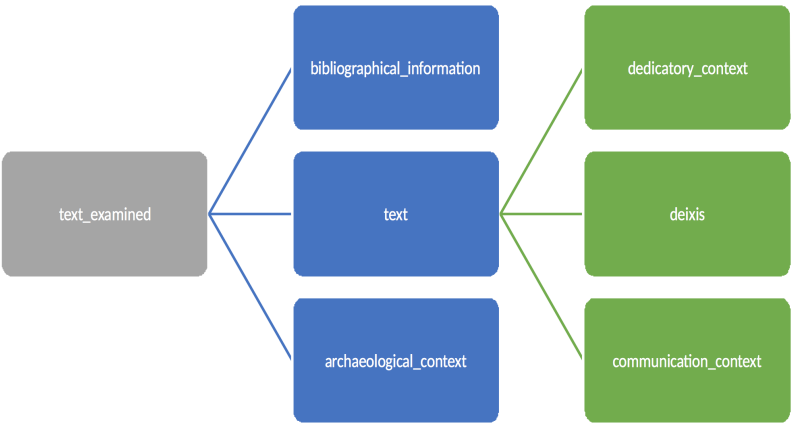


Fig. 1. default

4. An example: the present tense in dedicatory epigrams

The verbal tenses can work as temporal deictic markers and can play an important role in the definition of the temporal frame.¹⁴ In particular, the present tense usually decodes the present time, which is the time of the deictic centre ('now'). Since the deictic centre operates as a point of reference for the spatial and temporal orientation, individuating the deictic centre helps determine the frame of reference of the epigram. This could lay, for example, in the act of dedication celebrated, in the moment of the composition by the poet or in the moment of reading.¹⁵

In the definition of the deictic centre in dedicatory epigrams, the analysis of the verb of dedication is particularly relevant, since this makes clear the relation of the text to the dedicatory act, which is the main piece of information of the epigram. The most common dedicatory formula presents the verb in the indicative aorist (with augment). Leaving aside the formulaic aorist and those cases where the verb is not expressed or lost, we find in the corpus analysed a significant number of cases where the verb that expresses the dedication is in the indicative present.¹⁶

As for the 41 occurrences of verbs of dedication in the indicative present, a clear distinction can be observed between epigrams on stone and epigrams with a literary tradition. In the first group, the present form is much more sporadic. Out of 422 epigrams analysed, we find only 5 clear examples, from different epochs and geographical areas: [CEG 192i] (Athens, ca. 520? BC ἀνακεῖμα[ι]), [CEG 302] (Attica, found in Ptoion, ca. 540? BC v. 1 εἶμ')¹⁷ [CEG 251] (Athens, ca. 500-480? BC v.1 εἶμι), [CEG 390] (Apollonia Illyrica, found in Olympia, ca. 450-440? BC

¹⁴ Though the grammatical category of tense does not always coincide with the semantic category of time, it is still possible to retrace in the use of a peculiar verbal form a reference to time. However, such analysis must always consider other linguistic elements, which contribute determine the temporal frame of the text. On temporal deixis and verbal tense see [LYONS \(1977, 677-690\)](#); [LEVINSON \(1983, 73-79\)](#); [KLEIN \(1994, 14-26 and 120-130\)](#). For the analysis of temporal deixis in Ancient Greek texts see e.g. [D'ALESSIO \(2004\)](#) and [EDMUNDS \(2008, 8f.\)](#) (with further bibliography).

¹⁵ On the relation between the temporal frame of the utterance and the deictic centre, see [LEVINSON \(1983, 79f.\)](#) and [D'ALESSIO \(2004\)](#).

¹⁶ More specifically, out of a corpus of 598 epigrams analysed, for the verb of dedication the aorist appears 379 times, the present 50 times. In 172 epigrams the verb is lost or absent. Moreover, some epigrams contains more then one verb of dedication and these could be expressed in different aspects and moods.

¹⁷ For the verb εἶμι in dedicatory formulas, see [LAZZARINI \(1976, 59f.\)](#).

v.1 ἀνακείμεθα), [CEG 822] (Geronthrai, 4th cent.? BC v.1 ἀνάκειται).¹⁸ In all these cases, the grammatical subject of the verb is the dedicated object. The use of the present form refers therefore to the present of the object, which, since the dedication, is for the time being in the place of the dedication. As is also clear from the fact that in most of these cases the object is the speaker, the use of the present verb indicates that the deictic centre is the dedicated object. It is also interesting to notice that most of the aforementioned epigrams contain a second verb of dedication, in the formulaic aorist form.¹⁹

For Hellenistic epigrams of literary tradition, the picture is different. First, the occurrence of dedicatory verbs in indicative present is less sporadic. Out of 176 epigrams analysed, the present form appears in 33 epigrams. In some of these cases, the situation is similar to that found in dedications on stone: the subject of the present verb is the dedicated object, which lays in the temporal deictic centre.²⁰ An important innovation is the fact that in some epigrams the subject of the verb of dedication in present form is the dedicator. The present verb refers therefore to the present time of the act of dedication accomplished by the dedicator. This means that the deictic centre is anchored now to the moment of the dedication, when the dedicator is obviously present. More evidently, in [Leon. AP VI 288 (HE 2213-2222)] and [Phan. AP VI 299 (HE 2994-3001)], the dedicator is the speaker and consequently the very deictic centre. Another interesting case is found in [Call. AP XIII 7 (HE 1129-1134)] and [Diosc. AP VI 220 (HE 1539-1554)]. In these two epigrams the dedicator, who speaks in the first person, pronounces the dedicatory formula, and this is reported by the epigram as a direct discourse. Such examples indicate that in the development of the Hellenistic epigram the frames of reference multiply. The authors explore new point of views, not anymore tied only to the dedicated object.

These figures, which obviously require more in-depth analysis, are an interesting sign of the transformation and development of the epi-

¹⁸ In addition to these, in [CEG 347] and [CEG 775i], the verbs ἀνακείμεθα and κοσμοῦμεν respectively are supplied. In [CEG 830ii] the verb ἀνάκειται refers to another dedication, not to the one celebrated by the epigram.

¹⁹ The exceptions are [CEG 822] and the fragmentary [CEG 192i].

²⁰ However, as opposed to the examples found in dedications on stone, the object is rarely the speaker. It is also interesting to note that the formulaic ἀνάκειμαι is frequently substituted by the simple form κείμαι. Similarly, in literary epigrams the simple τίθημι is preferred to ἀνατίθημι, which is traditional in epigraphic examples.

grammatic genre in the Hellenistic epoch. Though the poets still move along the path of the epigraphic tradition, they include new elements in their celebration of the dedicatory act. Elements already employed from the beginning of the epigrammatic genre are retrieved and renewed, by combining them with new perspectives.

5. Conclusion

The database presented here is designed to be a helpful tool in the study of heterogeneous material. This tool will allow us to apply an interdisciplinary approach, which combines epigraphic, linguistic and philological strategies. It not only helps to manage a large quantity of data, it also organises the results of the analysis on the texts in a practical way. The coherent organisation of the data into a database has two clear advantages. On the one hand, the database provides an overview of the whole corpus. This could be used, for example, to detect easily specific trends and recurring elements in the corpus, or to consult and combine the data from different points of view. On the other hand, it is possible to retrieve rapidly the data connected to each specific text. This comprehensive look, on the whole as well as in the particular, would be difficult to obtain otherwise and it makes the database a fundamental tool for dealing with complex materials and applying different levels of analysis. It is important to stress that this database aims to enable many possible, different research. The structure is not based on a single, pre-fixed hypothesis of investigation, but is built so as to let the user interrogate the data in different ways, without defining a priori the direction of the research. Moreover, the database is a dynamic tool and suitable for further and continual additions. This feature is particularly valuable in the field of the epigrammatic poetry, where continual discoveries of new material (on stone, but also on papyrus) require us to enlarge and re-work the corpora constantly. In this regard, the database presented here is not only a response to the recent need, in the specific field of epigrammatic studies, to create corpora that combine epigraphic and 'literary' materials, it is also open to future additions and new research.

Aknowledgments

The project is funded by the Excellence Cluster Topoi. I am grateful to Dominik Lukas, who helped me develop the structure of the database. I also thank Dr. Valentina Garulli for her helpful comments.

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