

# Molpoi

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The term *molpos* (from the verb *melpō*) properly designates a person celebrating a god and a ritual with both song and dance. Evidence for an association of *molpoi* comes principally from MILETOS (and its colonies, cf. *Inscriptions grecques dialectales d'Olbia du Pont 2*, ca. 450 BCE; IG 12.7 415 and 418, Aigiale, first century CE), though there were no doubt several other such groups in antiquity (e.g., *I. Ephesos* 900–901, second century BCE).

At Miletos, it is known that the *molpoi* formed a highly significant body, both in the political and the religious sense. Its legal authority was invoked in matters of citizenship (e.g., *Milet* I 3, 143A, 212/1 BCE). The annually appointed head of the group, the *AISYMNETES* (“ruler” or “arbiter”), was the principal official at Miletos until at least the early Roman period (cf. *Milet* 1.3, 122–8).

An inscription (Herda 2006) dating back to the second half of the sixth century BCE – preserved in a copy from ca. 200 BCE – discusses in considerable detail the rites undertaken by the officials of the group (the outgoing and the new *aisymnetes*, the *stephanephoroi*, and still others) near the start of each year in the month *Taureon* (April/May). During an event lasting four days, sacrifices were held in honor

of APOLLO Delphinios at the Delphinion, his sanctuary next to the harbor at Miletos (lines 6–18; Herda 2011). Amid other subjects, further passages from the inscribed regulation describe the elaborate procession undertaken by the representatives of the *molpoi* from the Delphinion to the oracular sanctuary of Apollo at DIDYMA, leading animals and other offerings to be sacrificed (lines 18–20 and 25–31).

Beyond the fundamental importance of the group for the city of Miletos, the regulation of the *molpoi* also testifies to the fact that they remained true to their name (Georgoudi 2001). Much of the inscription is concerned with religious practice: occasions for sacrifice, drinking and libations, almost always accompanied by songs (paeanes), contests, and presumably dancing.

SEE ALSO: Eponymoi; Hymns, Greek.

## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Georgoudi, S. (2001) “La procession chantante des Molpes de Milet.” In P. Brulé and C. Vendries, eds., *Chanter les dieux*: 153–71. Rennes.
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- Herda, A. (2011) “The organization of the cult of Apollo Delphinios in Miletos.” In M. Haysom and J. Wallensten, eds., *Current approaches to religion in ancient Greece*: 57–93. Stockholm.