**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 (paeans), contests, and presumably dancing.

SEE ALSO: Eponymoi; Hymns, Greek.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

