

THE RECIPIENT'S DESIGN: SOME NOTES ON THE LAYOUT OF HELLENISTIC ROYAL CORRESPONDENCE ON STONE

Alice Bencivenni

The vast majority of Hellenistic rulers' correspondence is known from texts preserved on stone.¹ With the exception of some epistles transmitted through literary sources and, for the Ptolemies, through papyri, it is inscriptions that preserve the greatest number of royal letters representative of the most important dynasties.² Any analysis of the layout of royal letters is therefore largely conditioned by the epigraphic medium, which has the property of being methodologically functional in defining the position and power of the recipient. This medium determines some fundamental aspects: on the one hand, it amplifies a quality inherent in this type of written text, that is the distance between those who produce and those who receive the correspondence; on the other hand, it influences all the distinctive features of the materiality of the letter, its layout and function, granting the recipient of the message, rather than the sender, the power to determine the design of the text and to have designs for the text.

¹ All dates are BCE. An updated list and/or collection of all extant pieces of Hellenistic royal correspondence in inscriptions is still unavailable. Pioneers on the subject, providing editions and commentaries of the inscriptions known at the time, are Schubart 1920 (including papyri); Schroeter 1932; Welles, *RC*; Wilhelm 1943. Editions of letters and διαγράμματα of the Antigonids are in Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institution II*, with an updated list of new texts in Hatzopoulos 2006, 85–86; Mari 2018, *passim*; Arnaoutoglou 2020, 304, tables 15.1–15.2. Concerning the Ptolemies, editions – both papyri and inscriptions – of ordinances (προστάγματα), ordinances written in epistolary format (ἐπιστολαί and ἐντολαί) and, if appropriate, attached petitions to kings (ἐντεύξεις) or officials (ὑπομνήματα) are in *C.Ord. Ptol.*². Recent additions: a list in Käppel 2021, 512; *IPtolemaic* 84, 125; *IG Cyrenaica*² 016800, 062830. Epigraphic letters of Antigonids and Ptolemies found in Asia or on “islands in Asiatic waters” are collected in Welles, *RC*, which lacks recent discoveries. A full list of the royal correspondence inscriptions of the Seleukids and the Attalids is in Bencivenni 2014, 165–171, updated in Boffo 2021, 382 n. 20.

² Fundamental overviews of Hellenistic royal correspondence include Muir 2009, 83–116; Virgilio 2011, 19–75; Ceccarelli 2013, 297–311, and 2017; Sickinger 2013.

Alice Bencivenni, University of Bologna, Italy, alice.bencivenni2@unibo.it, 0000-0001-5778-8677

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1. COMMUNICATION AT A DISTANCE

If we start from the definition of “letter” recently proposed by Roy K. Gibson and Andrew Morrison:³

(a) a written message from one person (or set of people) to another, (b) requiring to be set down in a tangible medium, (c) which itself is to be physically conveyed from sender(s) to recipient(s), (d) overtly addressed from sender(s) to recipient(s), by the use at beginning and end of one of a limited set of conventional formulae of salutation (or some allusive variation on them) which specify both parties to the transaction, (e) [usually involving] two parties [who] are *physically distant (separated) from one another*, and so are unable to communicate by unmediated voice or gesture, (f) normally expected to be of relatively limited length;

it will be noted that distance plays a decisive role in shaping epistolary communication, as is indeed implicit in the etymology of one of the Greek terms documented as indicating this written object, namely ἐπιστολή.⁴ Even though it does not refer to the medium, which is an essential component of this form of communication, Paola Ceccarelli’s definition is telling in this regard:⁵

a written process of communication between two or more specific individuals or groups (real or fictional) who find themselves in a situation of *spatial distance*, or more precisely, who are *not in direct, face-to-face contact*. As a result of this *spatial distance*, and of the *time-lag* necessary for the letter to arrive at its destination, epistolary exchanges imply a *temporal distance*, which will find a reflection in the temporal deixis adopted in the letter itself.

Although there are particular cases in Greek papyri in which distance is not a *conditio sine qua non* for classifying a document as an epistle,⁶ the parameter of distance is, in fact, significant for the epistolography on stone. Indeed, distance has to do not only with the movement, in space and time, through which the message and its medium are transferred from the sender to the recipient, but also with the movement, in space and time, through which the message is transferred from one medium to another, from the perishable medium (mostly papyrus) to stone. From

³ Gibson and Morrison 2007, 3 (italics by the author). Similar statement in Muir 2009, 1; Sarri 2018, 5.

⁴ Ceccarelli 2013, 17.

⁵ Ceccarelli 2013, 9 (italics by the author). I am deeply grateful to Paola Ceccarelli for her authoritative information and epistolary advice.

⁶ According to Mirizio 2021, 3, letters that were not sent and copies of letters kept by the sender or by an office for reference purposes are to be considered exceptions. As far as letters attested in Greek inscriptions are concerned, letters that were written as such even if the writing king/queen was sojourning in the addressed city could be considered exceptions: e.g. *I.Sardis* II 307–310 (Antiochos III and Laodike to the people of Sardis in 213).

this point of view, distance is doubled: after the message departed from its sender and first redactor, another step was added, one which took place at the addressee's end and might on occasion be greatly delayed in time, from the papyrus to another medium, with all that follows in terms of the layout and function of the text. The distance is attested to by words: of the several terms used in the Greek language to refer to the epistolary document, many concern the material on which the letter was inscribed (βυβλίον/βιβλίον, μολύβδιον, διφθέρα) and its shape (πίναξ, δέλτος/δελτίον),⁷ but none the stone medium. Disposition on stone is evidently a secondary disposition.

For official epigraphic correspondence, what inevitably counts is the disposition on the stone medium decided by the recipient, with this latter to be understood as the addressee of the letter, as well as, in some cases, the recipient of the advantages that the letter guarantees, be it a city, an institutionally defined group, an official, or a single individual. The recipient thus defined was not necessarily responsible for deciding the publication on stone, although this was most often the case – instances of Hellenistic kings prescribing that their letters or ordinances be written on stone are indeed rare;⁸ conversely, the recipient was always the author of the disposition the text assumes on the new medium.

The existence of formats predetermined by kings when they prescribed the stone engraving of their communications seems to be disproven by the very ap-

⁷ Ceccarelli 2013, 15–16; cf. Sarri 2018, 16–24.

⁸ Bencivenni 2014, 145–151, with references to the only two Attalid inscriptions (Welles, *RC* 51 and 53, letters of Eumenes II to κάτοικοι and to the guild of the Dionysiac artists respectively) and nine Seleukid inscriptions, whose publication was ordered by the king. This list includes *SEG* XXXV 1476 (Anaxarchos to the οἰκεταί of the island of Ikaros forwarding a letter of the official Ikadion to Anaxarchos, 203/2?); *SEG* XXIX 1613 (six letters of Antiochos III and two ὑπομνήματα of Ptolemy son of Thraseas to the king, 202/1 and 199–195); Welles, *RC* 44 (letter of Antiochos III to an official, 189); Ma 2004, no. 43A (letter of Antiochos III to an official [?], 220–188); Welles, *RC* 70 (letter of king Antiochos to Euphemos followed by ὑπομνηματισμός by the king; cf. *JGLS* VII 4028; second copy with Seleukid date corresponding to 143, Hallof 2022); four letter-προστάγματα: the letter of Antiochos II in the dossier concerning the sale of lands and a village to queen Laodike in 254/3 (Welles, *RC* 18–20); the letter of Antiochos III in the dossier concerning Nikanor in 209, two copies (Ma, *Antiochos* 4 and *SEG* LIV 1353); the letter of Antiochos III in the dossier concerning the cult of queen Laodike in 193, three copies (Ma, *Antiochos* 37, *IG Iran Asia centr.* 66 and 68); the letter of Seleukos IV to his chief minister Heliodoros in the dossier concerning Olympiodoros in 178, now attested in three copies (*CIIP* IV 3511, cf. *SEG* LVII 1838; *CIIP* IV 3512, cf. *SEG* LXIV 1781; *SEG* LXV 1640). In Antigonid correspondence, the king regularly prescribes publication for ordinances both directly (military διαγράμματα) and indirectly through his subordinates (civic διαγράμματα; Hatzopoulos 2006, 82–84); Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* II 13 (second copy *SEG* LI 640bis); 15; 16 (full text in Hatzopoulos 2021–2022, 7–8); *SEG* LVI 625. Some Antigonid letters bear instructions for publication too: Demetrios to Ladamas (?), Hatzopoulos 2006, 88–89 (unpublished); Antigonos Gonatas to Agasikles, *SEG* XLVIII 783 (second copy *SEG* LI 796); Philip V to the Κατλεσταί, Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* II 5; Philip V to Archippos, Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* II 17. An order to publish the attached πρόσταγμα is also in the Ptolemaic letter of Kleopatra VII and Ptolemy XV Caesar to the strategos of the Herakleopolite nomos in 41 (*C.Ord. Ptol.*² 75–76).

pearance of these inscriptions, in particular when letters written by the same king or multiple copies of the same text are preserved. The three surviving copies of the letter-*πρόσταγμα* with which Antiochos III established the cult of queen Laodike in 193 are a case in point. These inscriptions, coming from Dodurga (Phrygia), the area of present-day Kermanshah (Media), and Laodikeia (Media), differ completely in terms of medium, writing and layout characteristics.⁹

The first is a rectangular stele of white marble with scarcely characterized writing, except for the smaller, suspended round letters and for some letters inclined to the right (*epsilon, iota, pi, tau, ypsilon*), carved with little care and order, in a “négligée” manner.¹⁰ The stonecutter engraved the two documents composing the dossier in reverse chronological order, faithful to the typical sequence of sending attachments: first the letter from the official Anaximbrotes to Dionytas, then the letter, sent by the sender as an attachment, from Antiochos III to Anaximbrotes. He also respected the customary right alignment of the final epistolary formulae, closing greetings and date, found in the first document.

The second inscription is a slightly pyramidal stone slab. The letters are engraved without elegance or regularity, with round letters at times small, at times of normal size. The lines are not horizontal and rise progressively to the right. There are traces of the influence of cursive writing, although not dominant (*omega* is always cursive, *sigma* never is; *epsilon* tends towards the lunate shape but without consistency).¹¹ The stonecutter reversed the original sequence of the two documents that make up the dossier, restoring the chronological order: first the letter from Antiochos III to the official Menedemos, then the letter from Menedemos to Thoas, in which the sender declares that the king’s letter follows (*sic*) by attachment (τοῦ γραφέντος πρὸς ἡμᾶς προστάγματος παρὰ τοῦ βασι[λ]έως ὑποτέτακται τὸ ἀγτίγραφον, ll. 24–26). The two texts, separated by a vacat, are arranged in a particular way: the first, the king’s, is engraved with a left margin of 3.3–3.5 cm, the second of 4.5 cm. Both epistles end with the date aligned to the right.

Finally, the third inscription is a pedimented stele with three sculpted acroteria, a tympanum decorated with a rosette, and, on either side, two flowered stems in bas-relief. The writing, inserted into the epigraphic space thus delimited, is elegant and very accurate, with circular letters of smaller dimension, at times squeezed into the small spaces between larger letters, and no influence of cursive writing.¹² Each line starts with an entire word and can end with a variable vacat. The stonecutter

⁹ Ma, *Antiochos 37*; *IG Iran Asie centr.* 68 and 66 respectively.

¹⁰ Holleaux 1930, 246 and pl. XII–XIII. Cf. Fig. 20.

¹¹ Rougemont in *IG Iran Asie centr.* 68, esp. at p. 144 and fig. 68.1–2. Cf. Fig. 21. I wish to thank Françoise Rougemont and Rémy Boucharlat for kindly providing me with the pictures of this inscription and of the following one.

¹² Rougemont in *IG Iran Asie centr.* 66, at pp. 143–144 and fig. 66. Cf. Figs. 22A–22B.

faithfully reproduced the sequence in which the two documents that make up the dossier were received: first the letter from the official Menedemos to Apollodotos, then, separated by a *vacat*, the letter, sent as an attachment, from Antiochos III to Menedemos. In both cases the date is aligned to the right.

The comparison between these three specimens, and especially between the last two, which originated from the same area and were produced at the same time at a distance of about 150 km from each other, shows that the epigraphic production – medium and writing – was largely dependent on contingencies related to the “epigraphic habit” and to the skills of the available craftsmen.¹³ As regards the layout, then, the discretion of the recipient was decisive: in this case the recipient was the local officials given the assignment to publish the letters on stone, for they represented the last link of the Seleukid hierarchical chain through which the royal order was transmitted in the form of attachments cascading down through the various administrative units. The surprising choice, attested by the Kermanshah specimen, that led Thoas to place the king's epistle at the top contrary to tried and tested bureaucratic practice, may well be the result of a mere material error on the part of Thoas himself or the epigraphic workshop;¹⁴ however, it may instead indicate the pointless zeal of an inexperienced official. The pre-eminence of the royal text was indeed enhanced not so much by its position on the epigraphic medium, but rather by the practice of vividly representing in stone the effective transmission of the royal order through a string of officials located in the remotest territories of the kingdom.¹⁵ The very publication of the letters in compliance with the instructions in the attachment and the evidence represented by the dating formula aligned to the right, essential for certifying the temporal distance of the epistolary communication, combined to emphasize the efficiency of the Seleukid system of governance in space and time.¹⁶

This obviously does not exclude the possibility that epistolary publications engraved in chronologically and geographically congruent areas may display a certain homogeneity of format. Such is the case, for instance, of the dossier of Seleukeia in Pieria, composed of a decree by the city and the letter by Seleukos IV to Theophilos and to the city itself, as well as the Maresha dossier, in which Seleukos IV's let-

¹³ As Rougemont states in *IG Iran Asie centr.* at p. 144, the difference between the formats cannot be necessarily attributed to the contrast between the potential of a Greek city (Laodikeia) and that of a military district (area of Kermanshah).

¹⁴ The stonecutter of Ma, *Antiochos 4*, a huge stone stele “topped by a large, semi-circular pediment, with the numerals αβγ’ carved discreetly”, was perhaps trying to avoid similar mistakes, reminding himself of “the order in which to carve the letters”. Cf. Malay 1987, 7 n. 5 and pl. 4–5.

¹⁵ Ma, *Antiochos*, at pp. 147–150; Capdetrey 2007, 344–359.

¹⁶ Concerning the fast delivery of royal correspondence through the vast territory of the Seleukid realm, cf. Bencivenni 2014, 159–160. Regarding dates as visual separators, cf. Kosmin 2018, 73–75.

ter to Heliodoros is preceded by two letters from Seleukid officials.¹⁷ The two tall stelae, dated 186 and 178 respectively, are very similar, surmounted by a pediment, jutting only in the first case, with three acroteria at the corners and a rosette relief in the center.¹⁸

In some instances, the publication of a royal letter on stone depended on obtaining a permission from the king, which implied his approval and, possibly, his economic contribution to the epigraphic production, but apparently not his intervention with regard to the format of the inscription. In the letter by Attalos, brother of Eumenes II, concerning the privileges of the *κάτοικοι* of Apollo Tarsenos, reference is made to an [ἄξιωμα] presented to the king in which the *κάτοικοι* expressed the desire to engrave the requested concessions on stone. This exchange resulted in the production of an inscription in which Attalos' epistle is followed by another fragmentary text in smaller letters, perhaps an accompanying message.¹⁹ In the *ὑπόμνημα* addressed by Kadoos, priest of Apollo Pleurenos, to the *ἀρχιερεύς* Euthydemos (after 188), permission is asked for the erection of a stele with the names of the initiates. This prompted the exchange of at least three letters between the officials in charge of executing the request. The result was the production of a stele bearing a molding at the top with the depiction of an olive branch followed by the *ὑπόμνημα* of Kadoos, including only two of the three letters containing the *fiat* of the officials and a fragmentary list of initiates.²⁰

The most significant example of this phenomenon remains the astounding monument engraved by the priests of Isis in Philae between 124 and 116. After having been granted the requested privilege from Ptolemy VIII, Kleopatra II and Kleopatra III, namely an exemption from the obligation to provide supplies for officials and troops passing through the area, they also obtained the concession to *ἀναθεῖναι στήλην ἐν ἧ ἄναγράφομεν | τὴν γεγονυῖαν ἡμῖν ὑφ' ὑμῶν περὶ τούτων φιλανθρωπίαν, |*

¹⁷ Welles, *RC* 45 and *CIIP* IV 3511 (cf. *SEG* LVII 1838). Regarding uniformity of Seleukid letters' display-practices, cf. Ceccarelli 2017, 241.

¹⁸ Seyrig 1932, pl. LIV; Cotton and Wörrle 2007, figs. 1, 4–5. Cf. Fig. 23. The existence of a second copy of this last inscription set up in the same city (Maresha/Beit Guvrin) is now attested by a very fragmentary stele (*CIIP* IV 3512). It is difficult to explain the need for two copies in the same area: as the king Seleukos IV ordered to Heliodoros that τὸ ἀντίγρα[φον τῆς ἐπιστολῆς (τῆς) ἡμετέρας ἀνα]γραφὴν εἰς στήλας | [λιθίνας, ἀνατεθῆι ἐν τοῖς ἐπιφανεσ]τάτοις τῶν ἐν τοῖς | [τόποις ἱερῶν] (*CIIP* IV 3511, fr. e, ll. 12–15), the editor, Dov Gera, assumes that Diophanes, the last recipient of the king's order, decided to place one copy in the lower and one copy in the upper part of the city (Tel Maresha/Sandahanna), unless it is to be supposed that one inscription “accidentally broke while in preparation”.

¹⁹ Welles, *RC* 47 (cf. Chandezon, *Elevage* 50) and, below, n. 38. As far as I know, no image of this inscription is available.

²⁰ Ma, *Antiochos* 49 (cf. *SEG* XLVI 1519); cf. Malay and Nalbantoğlu 1996, 75–79, no. 1 and fig. 1, pl. XVI; below, n. 37. Regarding the status of the sanctuary of Apollo Pleurenos, cf. most recently Walser 2015, 425.

ἵνα ἡ ὑμετέρα χάρις ἀείμνηστος ὑπάρχει παρ' αὐτῆι εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.²¹ Although the request explicitly referred to a stele, and the sovereigns consequently permitted it to be erected, in fact the priests later decided otherwise. Their ἔντευξις, preceded by two royal letters – the first, in which the sovereigns forwarded the letter addressed to Lochos, the στρατηγός of the Thebaid, granting the publication, and a second attached letter for Lochos with the order of execution –, was engraved on the base of one of the two nine-meter-high pink granite obelisks that stood in front of the propylaea of the temple of Isis. The case of the famous Philae Obelisk, now situated out of context in the lawns of the Kingston Lacy estate in Dorset, attests to how decisive the recipient's disposition was and how far it could stray from the sender's control.²²

2. LETTERS AND OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE

The letter is an eminently written communication, γράμμα/τα, a sequence of signs.²³ This is all the more true for epistles transferred onto stone, in which the visual aspect of the message is magnified by the epigraphic medium and reinforced by its public display, the latter always motivated by a precise purpose that goes beyond the original needs of communication between sender and recipient. If we consider, as mentioned above, that publication on stone was foreseen by the king himself for only a small percentage of the texts of royal messages, the rest of the documentation shows that the emergence of monumentalized letters stemmed for the most part from the initiative of the recipient (or beneficiary of the king's orders).²⁴

In any case, for both letters the king himself wanted on stone and letters written on the initiative of the recipient/beneficiary, the execution often involved other texts, alongside and in addition to the royal letters and ordinances in epistolary form. Therefore, the scope of royal correspondence is not limited to the documents related to the identity of the king-sender of the epistolary communication, but covers the outgoing and incoming flow of documents produced by the court chancery and local administrative offices more broadly.²⁵ Furthermore, since the state of the available evidence entails the majority of these texts having been preserved by virtue of being put on public display at the city level, also the civic decrees that established

²¹ *IEgypte prose* 22, ll. 37–40 (cf. *OGIS* 137–139; *SB* 8396; *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 51–52; *I.Philae* 19; *I.Alexandrie ptol.* 42). A new edition of the texts will be available in *I.Ptolemaic* 424.

²² Letronne 1842, pl. XV, I; for the Greek inscription: Masséglija 2020, 17, fig. 2.6B. Käppel 2021, 406–414, analyses the few cases of Ptolemaic ordinances written on stone. Cf. Fig. 25.

²³ Ceccarelli 2013, 16–17; Sarri 2018, 22–24.

²⁴ Bencivenni 2010; 2014, 145–151. This implies that stone inscription was carried out only when the king's word was favorable and helpful, which explains the generally positive content of the surviving letters.

²⁵ On Hellenistic royal chanceries: Virgilio 2011, 55–69.

a dialogue with the sovereign are relevant for investigating the layout of communications carried out by the king (and with the king).

In many cases the king's letter is accompanied on the same stone by letters from officials, petitions from individuals or groups addressing the king or his officials, and/or civic decrees. This practice gave rise to dossiers of documents on durable material, sometimes faithfully mirroring the specimens stored and preserved in the archives. Investigating the materiality of royal epistolary texts thus entails a systematic analysis of the inscribed documents that may be situated in the same context of display and/or on the same medium. However, while the first two types of documents – letters from officials and petitions – are traditionally the focus of research on Hellenistic rulers' correspondence and are included in relevant thematic collections,²⁶ civic decrees issued in the context of diplomatic exchange with sovereigns have only recently received their due attention.²⁷

Three dossiers, comprising selected documents from the 280s–260s, illustrate the impact that the medium and the arrangement of texts have on our understanding of the historical circumstances behind the diplomatic contacts between Hellenistic rulers and cities.

On the north anta of the temple of Athena Polias in Priene, the city published, among other documents, at least two texts pertaining to the diplomatic exchange with king Lysimachos, placing them immediately below the dedication and edict issued by Alexander the Great. Significantly, the first to be engraved, although it did not represent the very first instance of contact between the parties, is a decree in honor of Lysimachos, with the words Βασιλεῖ [Λυσιμάχῳ] placed before it, the transposition of the archive heading indicating the dedicatee of the honors being granted.²⁸ Below the decree is engraved the letter written by the king c. 286, after having received the honorary decree. This letter clearly reveals that the king did indeed grant concessions, while also making sure to reassert his previous epistolary request for obedience, promptly met by the city. The latter document, about which the city remains silent, was significantly excluded from public display.²⁹ As has been noted, the selection of the two documents represents, in a fictional narrative of a long distance dialogue, the incommunicability between the parties.³⁰ The city asserts its pre-eminence on stone,

²⁶ Letters of officials and petitions are accordingly taken into account when projects of comprehensive *corpora* on Hellenistic royal correspondence are outlined: Virgilio 2011, 73–75.

²⁷ Bertrand 1990; Ma, *Antiochos*, at pp. 179–242; Ceccarelli 2005; 2013, 298–311; 2018; Mari 2018; Capdetrey 2021, 331–334. An exception is Welles, *RC* 45 from Seleukeia in Pieria, extensively studied already by Holleaux 1933: the engraving of the decree is the occasion for publishing the king's letter as an attachment.

²⁸ *IPriene B - M* 2, l. 1 (*IPriene* 14); images available in *IPriene B - M* 2 II, at pp. 2–3. Cf. Boffo 2003, 61–67; 2021, 526.

²⁹ *IPriene B - M* 3, ll. 11–12 (*IPriene* 15); image available in *IPriene B - M* 2 II, at p. 4.

³⁰ Bertrand 1990, 110–111.

silencing the king's word when unfavorable, monumentalizing it when favorable. Yet the archive heading Βασιλεῖ [Λυσιμάχῳ], enlarged and dilated in the epigraphic space, is transformed into a conspicuous syntagm whose function is reminiscent of the dative case of the epistolary recipient, to the great pride of the city: immediately after Alexander, who had dedicated the temple imposing his presence on Priene, the city is able to boast of its correspondence with Lysimachos.

Around 270, Kyme successfully turned to Philetairos to purchase a supply of weapons in the critical circumstances of impending war and rewarded his free donation with appreciative honors. The city chose to display a white marble stele in which the dynast's letter is set between two decrees of the city in the Aeolic dialect, fully in line with the chronology of diplomatic contacts, with each new document starting on a new line without indentation. The missive in *koine* Greek is somehow highlighted by two *paragraphoi* delimiting it at the top and bottom,³¹ as well as by the particular care exercised by the stonecutter in engraving the letters, whose total number per line is considerably more regular than in the two decrees.³² At the same time, after the closing greeting on the same line, separated by a *vacat*, the letter bears a date, preceded and followed by a *vacat*, referring to the local calendar of Kyme. The date reproduced on the stele is the one affixed by the offices of the city upon receipt and filing of the epistle:³³ the local color thus acquired by the royal letter contributes to underlining the civic appropriation of the king's word and his benefits.

Even more explicit is the image in stone of the act of the king's word entering into the local public context in Miletos. The letter that Ptolemy II wrote to the city at the end of the 260s to praise its civic loyalty to the Ptolemaic cause was engraved at the top of a bluish marble stele, followed by two decrees.³⁴ Each new document starts on a new line with no indentation and is separated from the previous one by an interlinear space; the king's letter includes a final farewell formula, on the same line albeit separated by a *vacat*. The first decree is the brief open *προβούλευμα*, ratified by the council and the assembly, which approves the presentation of the royal letter and the envoy introducing the document to the assembly. The second is the long honorary decree for the king that ends with the decisions about disseminating the agreed-on resolutions on different media, including the publication of the decree and the letter – in this order – on a stele to be placed in the local sanctuary of Apollo. In the actual inscription, the chronological sequence of the documents prevails: first is the letter of Ptolemy II, then the decree, preceded by the *προβούλευμα*.

³¹ SEG L 1195; cf. Virgilio 2016, 217–238, esp. 230 (photograph). Regarding the use of *paragraphoi*, see most recently Faraguna 2020 and D. Amendola's chapter in this volume.

³² Virgilio 2016, 219.

³³ Boffo 2021, 383–384.

³⁴ *IDelphinion* 139 A–C (cf. *IMilet* 139 and pl. 9). Cf. Bencivenni 2013.

Through the sequence of the texts on stone, however, the pre-eminence of the royal letter is progressively subsumed into the city's two-stage deliberative procedure as part of which the king's word literally enters into the assembly. There, the royal word is subsequently transformed and reformulated in a civic language that echoes that of the king, and then implemented through the complex institution of oaths of allegiance made as part of public events.³⁵

Finally, Hellenistic official communication is characterized by the ability to "write letters" shared by the officials with their king.³⁶ As noted above, they passed on the king's orders to subordinates through short administrative notes in the form of letters.³⁷ In addition, officials had the authority to draw up articulate epistles, as autonomous senders and in full possession of the powers associated with their office, particularly when they are addressing cities. These documents are therefore usually included as part of the official correspondence of Hellenistic kings. This epistolary practice on the part of the king's officials is epigraphically documented especially in the Ptolemaic and Seleukid context,³⁸ in particular as practiced by officials and *strategoï* in charge of the administration of Lagid possessions outside Egypt, and Seleukid officials.³⁹

³⁵ Bertrand 1990, 111.

³⁶ On writing letters (to cities) as a royal prerogative, cf. the famous passage from Plb. 5.57.5 concerning the usurper Achaïos.

³⁷ This procedure is fully attested for the epigraphic royal correspondence of the Seleukids (cf., for selected instances, above, n. 8). There are some instances for the Antigonids (Hatzopoulos, *Macedonian Institutions* II 15, ll. 1-9: letter of Andronikos to the sanctuary of the Egyptian deities in Thessalonike, accompanying the διάγραμμα of Philip V on the administration of the *Serapeum*, ll. 10-28; 16, ll. 1-4: dispatch note to the ἐπιμεληταί, accompanying the διάγραμμα of Philip V on the στεφανίται games, ll. 5-18; 19, ll. 1-6: letter of Doules to Nikolaos forwarding the circular letter of a king, Philip V or Perseus, concerning the Daisia festival); and for the Ptolemies (*SB* 3926, cf. *LEgypte prose* 36, ll. 1-9: letter of Theon to the city of Ptolemais Hermiou, forwarding the ordinance concerning the temple of Isis issued by Ptolemy XII, ll. 10-19), who most frequently forward documents by themselves (e.g. *C.Ord.Ptol.*² 48-49, 51-52, 75-76; *IG Cyrenaica*² 011100). Among the instances of Attalid royal correspondence, highly exceptional is the inscription Ma, *Antiochos* 49 (cf. *SEG* XLVI 1519), which bears two brief epistolary notes by officials conveying a ὑπόμνημα of the priest Kadoos to the high priest Euthydemus (*post* 188). Cf. Thonemann 2013, 12 on Attalid patterns of administration.

³⁸ There is up to now only a very doubtful instance for the Attalids. Welles, *RC* 47 (cf. Chandezon, *Elevage* 50), from Soma in the Kaikos valley, is a letter of Attalos, the brother of Eumenes II, to an official concerning the tax-exemption of the κάτοικοι of the sanctuary of Apollo Tarsenos, dated 185. The letter is followed on the stone by a very fragmentary eleven-line text on the same subject, written in smaller letters (Schuchhardt 1899, 212-214, to whom we owe, as the only testimony, the uppercase transcription of the text), which has been interpreted as a letter. Pace Piejko 1989, who lengthily restores the text considering it a second letter of Attalos (cf. the remarks by Herrmann in *SEG* XXXIX 1337), this document could be tentatively interpreted as a covering letter of the official addressed above to an unknown addressee (Welles in *RC* at p. 191, discarded this identification for the sender only because he stated that covering letters "regularly precedes its inclosure when published on stone", a disregarded rule, as underlined above: cf. *IG Iran Asie centr.* 68 and, for the Attalids, Ma, *Antiochos* 49).

³⁹ Concerning the Ptolemies, cf. the letters of Aristoboulos and Asklepiodotos to Iasos (*Ilasos* 3), of Tlepolemos to Kildara (*SEG* XLII 994), of Thrasesas to Cilician Arsinoe (*SEG* XXXIX 1426), of an

Among the examples of officials' correspondence, the texts written in the 240s and 220s by Olympichos, *strategos* of Seleukos II, at the time an independent dynast and later in the service of Antigonos Doson and Philip V,⁴⁰ are worthy of note. Pertaining to the more conspicuous so-called "Olympichos dossier",⁴¹ they attest to the repeated publication of documents on the dispute between Mylasa and the priests of Labraunda regarding the city's right over the sanctuary and surrounding area. Among the official's letters, four were engraved upon receipt on the antae of three buildings in the sanctuary of Labraunda – the temple of Zeus (*ILabraunda* 3 and 137), the andron A (*ILabraunda* 4), and the andron B (*ILabraunda* 6).⁴² The other examples are known from later engravings, probably made between the end of the second and first centuries to be displayed in the same context (*ILabraunda* 3B, copy of 3; 8B) or even in the Imperial age (*ILabraunda* 2).⁴³ The distance of these specimens from the original sender is noteworthy, but their inscription on stone confirms their lasting authority for the recipients as a source of rights over the sanctuary many decades later.

3. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF ROYAL CORRESPONDENCE ON STONE

The correspondence of Hellenistic rulers inscribed on stone underwent a double process of selection: only a small percentage of the numerous texts produced by royal chanceries and local administrations was published on durable material,⁴⁴ and

unknown official to Euromos (*SEG* XLIII 705 and XLVI 1401), and of Aratomenes (?) to Cyrene (*IG Cyrenaica*² 097600). Concerning the Seleukids, cf. in particular the letters of Olympichos, the *strategos* of Seleukos II and later independent dynast, of Ikadion, an official (*strategos*?) active in the Red Sea area, and of Zeuxis, ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων of Antiochos III (on the powers, and writing powers, of Zeuxis, cf. Capdetrey 2007, 297–300). The relevant texts are, for the first, *ILabraunda* 2, 3, 3B, 4, 6, 8B, 137 (Carless Unwin and Henry 2016); *IMylasa* 22 (?), 23 (addressee: Mylasa); for the second, *SEG* XXXV 1476 (to Anaxarchos); for the third, Ma, *Antiochos* 5 (?; to Amyzon), 8 (?; to Amyzon), 15 (?; to the army), 25 (to Kildara), 31B (to Heraklea on the Latmos). The identity of the sender of *ILabraunda* 45, a letter assigned to Olympichos by the first editor Jonas Crampa, is now questioned by van Bremen 2017, 254, who convincingly identifies the author with Ptolemy "the Son", active in the 260s.

⁴⁰ Bencivenni in *Riforme costituzionali* at p. 262 n. 13; Aubriet 2012; Walser 2015, esp. 425–428.

⁴¹ *ILabraunda* 1–9; cf. Bencivenni, *Riforme costituzionali*, no. 9. Three new texts are now to be added to the dossier: Isager and Karlsson 2008 (*ILabraunda* 134; cf. *SEG* LVIII 1220); Carless Unwin and Henry 2016 (*ILabraunda* 137; cf. *SEG* LXV 996); van Bremen 2016 (*ILabraunda* 138; cf. *SEG* LXVI 1192).

⁴² Regarding the location of the anta blocks bearing the texts see most recently Carless Unwin and Henry 2016, 37–40. *LBW* 389 (*IMylasa* 23), copy of *ILabraunda* 4, attributed by Jonas Crampa to the Imperial age, is probably of the late third century, contemporary with most of the Labraunda dossier, as argued by van Bremen 2016, 1.

⁴³ Concerning the patterns of epigraphic publication at Labraunda, cf. Isager 2011.

⁴⁴ The size of the official correspondence on papyrus can be appreciated in Sarri 2018, 53–72. Regarding the "paperassière" Seleukid administration, cf. Capdetrey 2007, 344–350. Concerning documentary practices of Hellenistic royal and civic archives, cf. Hofmann 2015, 144–147.

only a fraction of the published texts have survived to the present day. Medium, layout and context of display thus offer a picture that is incoherent and quite difficult to delineate: moreover it is challenging to gain access to the inscriptions or legible images of the inscriptions, and editions only sometimes register the phenomenon of interaction between text and medium.

As mentioned, the main reason for publishing royal correspondence on stone, from the king's point of view, was to widely spread his decisions and his power ἐν τοῖς ἐπιφανεστάτοις τόποις (e.g. Welles, *RC* 44, l. 43). From the viewpoint of the letters' recipients, it was a question of either simply obeying an order or addressing the need to guarantee the duration of the benefits granted by the king or by the official representing him (a consistent motivation in the extant evidence, since in principle only letters favorable to the recipient were eventually displayed in stone). Meleagros, *strategos* of the Hellespontic Phrygia at the time of Antiochos I, writes accordingly to urge the citizens of Ilion: καλῶς δ' ἂν ποιήσαιτε ψηφισάμενοι τε πάντα τὰ φιλάνθρωπα αὐτῷ καὶ καθ' ὅτι ἂν | συγχωρήσῃ τὴν ἀναγραφὴν ποιησάμενοι καὶ στηλώσαντες καὶ θέντες εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, ἵνα μένη ὑμῖν | βεβαίως εἰς πάντα τὸν χρόνον τὰ συγχωρηθέντα (*Ilion* 33, ll. 13-17). Although the passage refers to Aristodikides, *philos* of the king, to privileges that the city should vote for him, and to the inscription of the concessions made by him, the text is quite clear: "so that the grant may remain legally yours for all time". The city's selection of documents is significant: the stele bears the letter of the official Meleagros followed by the three letters of the king sent by him as attachments, but not the civic honorary decree for Aristodikides nor the agreement between him and the city. These texts could, of course, have been published elsewhere, but in the layout of the surviving stone the city disappears entirely in favor of Aristodikides and his king.⁴⁵ They are the two main holders of title rights over the royal lands that the king grants to his *philos* with the clause that they be added to the borders of a city. The role of Ilion, which in turn becomes the holder of rights over those lands, is mainly passive, except for the crucial decision to monumentalize the official correspondence.

Displaying the king's word significantly distances the message from its sender and, by moving it to the public sphere of a city or a sanctuary, allows the recipients to appropriate it. This process of appropriation, which makes the king's word on stone an element of the urban or sacred landscape, asserts the king's material presence in the civic context, but at the same time validates, to varying degrees, the position of the political entities engaged in dialogue with him.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Welles, *RC* 10-13, pl. III. Cf. Bencivenni 2004.

⁴⁶ Capdetrey 2021, 331-334. Regarding the king's presence in civic archives, cf. Boffo 2013; Boffo 2021, 371-424.

One of the first examples of a Hellenistic royal text drafted on a durable medium, aside from the stele bearing the διάγραμμα of Ptolemy from Cyrene,⁴⁷ is the letter from Antigonos to Skepsis dated 311.⁴⁸ This letter was engraved on a stele, while a twin stele bore the text of the decree issued by the city in response. Both documents share the same paleography and layout and both were displayed in the sanctuary of Athena. Written in *stoichedon* style (34–35, with exceptions, for the letter; 30–31, with exceptions, for the decree), the two inscriptions, now lost, show the use of separation signs, in the form of *diplai stigmai*, that regularly subdivide sentences and propositions in the decree, yet are discontinuous and sometimes of obscure meaning in the letter.⁴⁹ In this first dossier testifying to the dialogue between one of Alexander's successors and a city, the two texts are materially separated by their medium while their form and the context of their placement unite them. The city's intervention on Antigonos' letter is significant, articulating its syntax laboriously, and not always effectively, through *diplai stigmai*, in a remarkable attempt to appropriate the king's word.

Showing a very different but equally effective approach, the inscription with the decree of Telmessos in honor of Ptolemy II, dated 282, completely incorporates the king's letter on a pedimented stele placed in the sanctuary of Apollo, Artemis, and Leto.⁵⁰ The inscription opens with the initial dating formulae, according to the Macedonian calendar and the regnal years of the king, and the formulae concerning the convocation of the civic assembly and the reading of the royal letter. Then, the stone bears the letter *in extenso*, re/citing it literally as if the text were a transcription of the oral reading of the original document that took place during the assembly. Indeed, the letter by Ptolemy II, with the formula addressing the city of Telmessos and its magistrates, begins on the same line with no break in continuity. In the final part, however, the farewell formula with the king's greetings is engraved on the same line, preceded and followed by large vacats, thus respecting the probable layout of the original letter and breaking both the *scriptio continua* and flow of the decree itself. There is no independent positioning for the king's text with contextual re-enactment or paraphrasing of its content in the city's decree, as in the stelae of Kyme and Miletos mentioned above. On the contrary, the word of the king is completely integrated within the text of the civic decree, on the part of a city dependent on the king *ipsissimis verbis*.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *IG Cyrenaica*² 010800: cf., below, n. 61.

⁴⁸ *OGIS* 5–6 (see also Dittenberger in *OGIS* II at p. 538).

⁴⁹ Only the capital transcription made by the first editor and his paleographical observations survive: see Munro 1899.

⁵⁰ Wörle 1978 (cf. *SEG* XXVIII 1224) and pl. 2.

⁵¹ Bertrand 1990, 111. Cf. Capdetrey 2022, 148–149.

The layout reveals yet another operation in the case of the imposing stele of Larisa,⁵² in bluish marble with a protruding upper edge, inscribed with the dossier regarding πολιτογραφία.⁵³ The inscription's primary function is to publish the list of new citizens (ll. 46–93) *κὰτ τε τὰς ἐπιστολὰς τοῖ βασιλεῖος καὶ κὰτ τὰ ψαφίσματα τὰς πόλιος* (l. 47). The list is preceded, along with the registration/effective date in accordance with the local calendar (ll. 1–2), by a quadripartite summary in genitive absolute of the normative background, with four documents attached to the actual list: two letters from Philip V to the *ταγοί* and to the city of Larisa, dated 217 and 215 (ll. 3–9; 26–39), and, interposed between these letters, two civic decrees (ll. 9–23; 40–46).⁵⁴

Before the list of new citizens, itself interspersed by three vacats separating their places of origin (Samothrace, Krannon, Gyrtion), there are four vacats on the stone that mark the normative reference sources. The first, at l. 3, precedes the incipit of the king's first letter. The second, at l. 9, introduces the first decree, issued to implement the royal prescriptions on πολιτογραφία, which reviews the king's letter, reformulating it in the local Thessalian dialect. The third, at l. 23, precedes the commemoration of the arrival of a second royal letter followed by the letter itself. Finally, the fourth, at l. 39, introduces the second decree, which remedies the revocation of citizenship rights by providing for new enrollments in accordance with the king's will.

The inclusion of royal documents in the narrative texture of civic deliberation is, on the one hand, a deferential *verbatim* reproduction of the king's word, while allowing, on the other hand, for its reformulation and embedding within the civic system. The layout choices reflect this dual position of the city, subject to Macedonian authority but at the same time responsible for implementing deliberations, as was required by the Antigonid legislative practice when dealing with areas such as granting citizenship.⁵⁵ The first letter from the king is remarkably highlighted by the vacat that precedes it and by the fact that some letters of the word βασιλεύς are larger and spaced farther apart, even though their size gradually becomes regular when it comes to the name of the king Φίλιππος. In the final part, the dating formula of the letter according to the Macedonian calendar and regnal year, albeit positioned on the same line, is highlighted by a vacat following it. The second letter, on the other hand, is marked by the beginning of a new paragraph, but is not at

⁵² Lolling 1882, 62 (facsimile at 60–61).

⁵³ *IG IX.2 517* (cf. *Syll.*³ 543) with Habicht 1970, 273–279 and pl. 76: full bibliography in Mari and Thornton 2016, esp. 149–158.

⁵⁴ Bertrand 1990, 111–112. Significantly, the author draws a parallel with the starting formulae of Ptolemaic *προστάγματα*, for which see Käppel 2021, 14–23. The composite nature of the inscription from Larisa corresponds to the provisions taken in the (second) decree, ll. 42–45.

⁵⁵ Hatzopoulos 2006, 90–92. Philip V significantly writes in his first letter: κρῖνω ψηφίσσασθαι ὑμᾶς (*IG IX.2 517*, l. 6). For an excellent analysis of the inscription and the dialogue between king and city: Mari and Thornton 2016, 149–153.

all emphasized in relation to the rest. The vacat is placed further above, before the narrative on the arrival of a second letter, and then appears again around the final dating formula. The other two large vacats instead frame the sequence ψαφιζαμένας τᾶς πόλιος ψάφισμα (ll. 9, 39), also characterized by a larger *psi* and slightly greater spacing between the letters.⁵⁶

Something similar occurs in the dossier dating from the reign of Ptolemy IX and coming from the agora of Cyrene.⁵⁷ Although it concerns a city dependent on royal authority, by virtue of the disposition on stone decided by the recipient of the communication, the dossier qualifies as an affirmation of civic identity. The inscription, consisting of two columns of writing, contains a decree issued by Cyrene and, on the side, three royal documents in *koine* Greek, the first of uncertain typology, then a letter from Ptolemy IX and Kleopatra addressed to Cyrene, dated 108, with the ἀντίγραφον of the πρόσταγμα of the rulers attached.⁵⁸ The medium, damaged on three sides, is an elegantly engraved marble slab originally affixed to an architectural structure. As far as the layout is concerned, one could venture a comparison with the two-column *pagina* format found in the official epistolary writing of P.Mich. I 46, in which the second column of writing is obtained by joining a second sheet to the first “with the joint running across the intercolumnium”.⁵⁹

The function of the dating formula in the second column has long evaded scholarly understanding (B, l. 12).⁶⁰ Located between the final part of the first document and the beginning of the royal letter, well isolated by large vacats on all sides, it is expressed in the day and month of the Cyrenean calendar. Unanimously considered the final dating of the document that precedes it, itself erroneously considered a civic document, the formula instead belongs – as attested to by the layout – to the royal letter that immediately follows. To be precise, this is the dating added in Cyrene when the royal letter with its attachments was registered in the archive: the filing note was then preserved on the stone together with the reverse chronological order typical of documents sent by attachment. This detail assumes a great importance, including graphical significance. In accepting the πρόσταγμα of the kings, as well as the invitation the sovereigns express in the letter for the γνώμη of the πρόσταγμα to be included in the judicial διάγραμμα in force in the city, the Cyreneans enclosed

⁵⁶ No published image of this stele exists. I wish to thank Bruno Helly for providing me with a beautiful one (from the *Archives thessaliennes de Lyon – Fond Christof Wölter*), through the help of our common friend Manuela Mari. Cf. Figs. 24A–24B.

⁵⁷ *IG Cyrenaica*² 011100 (cf. *SEG IX 5*), found north-west of the Temple of Demeter and Kore: photograph at <<https://igcyr2.unibo.it/en/igcyr011100>> (courtesy of Catherine Dobias-Lalou). Cf. Fig. 26.

⁵⁸ Berthelot 2015, 220–222.

⁵⁹ Sarri 2018, 97–100, esp. 98, 99, fig. 12. Dimensions are obviously very different (*IG Cyrenaica*² 011100: w. 0.645; h. 0.57; P.Mich. I 46: w. 0.245; h. 0.30).

⁶⁰ Despite Musti 1957, 282–284.

the royal word within the civic framework by means of the local dating formula. Thus, they created a graphic counterpoint to the royal dating at the bottom of the letter, which starts on a new line and is effectively highlighted by the remarkable indentation (B, ll. 15–16).⁶¹ The presence, on the left, of the civic decree in honor of the royal family further enhanced this absorption of the royal letter and ordinance, preserved in their original layout, into a civic dimension: it left some (albeit minimal) room for affirming the city's deliberative and administrative autonomy.⁶²

The display context of the king's word is completely different when a series of royal letters are published as a group along with other letters and decrees pertaining to cities or leagues. The rationale for publishing the texts regarding the recognition of the Panhellenic character of the games in honor of Asclepius and the ἀσυλία of the sanctuary of Cos⁶³ remains unclear to this day. Nonetheless, the edition of new documents belonging to the dossier, including two royal letters, sheds light on the history of this first publicly displayed archive of texts concerning ἀσυλία, starting with its chronology, now established as 244/3.⁶⁴ Found on the three terraces of the sanctuary, the various stelae composing the dossier are inscribed on either one side or both (opisthographic) and in one case the stele is prismatic and inscribed on three sides. On the whole, positive responses coming from cities and kings were inscribed, possibly by different hands, on the same medium even if they were eventually brought to their destination by different θεωρίαι and, therefore, without necessarily taking into account the chronological sequence of reception.⁶⁵

Of the eight surviving royal letters,⁶⁶ four are inscribed on the three faces of the prismatic stele: a. Antigonos Gonatas (?) and Ziaelas; b. Seleukos II (?); c. an un-

⁶¹ The addition of a civic date to royal texts does not always have the form (and power?) of the framing operation carried out by the Cyreneans more than two hundred years earlier, when they received and engraved the δῆγμα of Ptolemy, adding to it a full list of local officials including the eponym (*IG Cyrenaica*² 010800, ll. 72–87; cf. *SEG IX 1*). On the significance of (archival) civic dates for the assumption of royal regulations, Boffo 2021, 578–580, with specific references to the two royal enactments from Cyrene.

⁶² On the ties between royal ordinances and civic norms at Cyrene, cf. Boffo 2021, 387–388, nn. 31–32.

⁶³ This ἀσυλία dossier was reedited by Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 8–52, and now by D. Bosnakis, K. Hallof, and K. Rigsby in *IG XII.4* 207–243 (later additions: Bosnakis and Hallof 2020). Much clearer is the context of publication of the ἀσυλία dossier of Magnesia on the Maeander, extensively studied by Ceccarelli 2018 with an insightful analysis of the language of power between cities and kings.

⁶⁴ Bosnakis and Hallof 2020, 293–294, B, ll. 74–75: the new letter from Ziaelas (Zigelas) of Bithynia bears the date of the 39th year of the Bithynian civic era, which starts with the battle of Curupedion, 282/1 (39th = 244/3). Cf. *ibid.*, 318–320 and Hatzopoulos 2021.

⁶⁵ Organization of the θεωρίαι: Klaus Hallof in *IG XII.4.1*, at pp. 169–170. On the random geographical origin of the documents displayed on stone: Boffo 2021, 540 n. 104–105.

⁶⁶ *IG XII.4* 208 (Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 10; Antigonos Gonatas?); 209 (Rigsby *Asyilia*, 11; Ziaelas of Bithynia); 210 (Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 9; Seleukos II?); 211 (unknown king); 212 (Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 8; Ptolemy III); 213 (Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 12; Paerisades II of Bosporan kingdom or one of his two sons?); Bosnakis and

known king. The letter by Ptolemy III is on a stele of its own. The letter by a Bosphoran king is inscribed on an opisthographic stele bearing the decree of Gela on the other side.⁶⁷ Finally, the letters from Zigelas and Laodike I are on an opisthographic stele that bears two decrees on the same side and four decrees on the other. With the exception of the letters from Ziaelas/Zigelas and Laodike I, the royal texts are not preserved in their entirety, especially as regards the header, and it is therefore difficult to identify layout models except for the prominent position regularly occupied by the closing farewell formula, coming after a vacat on the same line or on the line below at the start of a new paragraph.

Throughout the *ἀσυλία* dossier of Cos, in the case of several texts on the same medium, a recurrent feature for decrees is a first line that protrudes to the left of the main text⁶⁸ or the indication of provenance reproducing the archive label, added at the top in broader, enlarged letters, isolated between two vacats.⁶⁹ As for the royal letters, Ziaelas's epistle is characterized only by the wide vacat that separates it from the previous letter.⁷⁰ In contrast, the recently published opisthographic stele presents a descriptive annotation, positioned at the beginning of the royal letters of Zigelas and Laodike, showing an archive registration: ἐπιστολαὶ δὲ ταῖδε ἦλθον παρὰ Ζιγίλα ἔχουσαι ἐπίσαμον ἰππῆ and παρὰ Λαοδίκης ἔχουσιν ἐπίσαμον ἄνκυραν.⁷¹ Both descriptions are protruding; the first is followed by the epistle with an equally protruding greeting formula; the second, briefer, has wide spacing.

The annotations refer to the practice of sealing official documents on perishable material, the correlated opening of the documents by breaking the seals, and their description during the process of archiving.⁷² They are functional to the reception of the engraved texts: they mark the sender, preserving some material characteristics of the original medium (a seal featuring a knight for the king of Bithynia, or with an anchor for queen Laodike). The archival annotation, which is in fact typical of

Hallof 2020, III B (Zigelas of Bithynia); IV B (Laodike I). Rigsby, *Asyilia*, 13, a supposed Ptolemaic royal letter concerning the *ἀσυλία*, is now considered a letter by Ptolemy IV not pertaining to the dossier in *JG* XII.4 249. Coşkun 2018, 228, speculates that the sender of *JG* XII.4 210 is Antiochos Hierax; on the contrary Coşkun 2021, 38–39, assumes that the sender of *JG* XII.4 213 is Mithradates II of Pontos and the sender of both *JG* XII.4 210 and Bosnakis and Hallof 2020, IV B is Laodike, the daughter of Ziaelas of Bithynia and wife of Antiochos Hierax.

⁶⁷ *JG* XII.4 213. Regarding the identification of the sender, cf., above, n. 66.

⁶⁸ E.g. *JG* XII.4 214, with two letters from Cretan cities, Istron and Phaistos, and the decree from Hierapytna.

⁶⁹ E.g. Bosnakis and Hallof 2020, A, ll. 8, 25, 44; B, l. 50. For archive "titles": Boffo 2021, 539–542.

⁷⁰ Herzog 1905, pl. VII.

⁷¹ Bosnakis and Hallof 2020, 294 Abb. 2; 312, Abb. 8; 320, Abb. 9: B, ll. 67 and 76. I am grateful to Klaus Hallof and Dimitris Bosnakis for kindly providing me pictures of the stele. Cf. Figs. 27A–27B.

⁷² Concerning Hellenistic (outer) sealing practices, cf. Boffo 2021, 380–395 (royal documents); 530–534 (decrees).

Cos,⁷³ also shows that the epistles arrived (ἤλθον) at their destination borne not by the θεωροί of Cos, but by royal messengers.⁷⁴ Transposed onto stone, the intention of providing visibility to the authority of the royal replies underlines the civic effort of self-promotion. In the broader display context of the various stelae composing the dossier, however, this effort does not seem to prioritize royal letters over the positive replies originating from the cities by letter or decree. The only real exception is the prismatic stele mentioned above, whose material peculiarity, if indeed it was intended to distinguish royal texts, was not large enough to accommodate all of them, perhaps due to an erroneous prediction of the total number of positive responses coming from the sovereigns.

To conclude this selective overview, I wish to address a unique case of a recipient re-functionalizing the word of the king. A marble cippus with molding from Perrhaibian Tripolis is inscribed with two letters written by Antigonos Doson in 222 and addressed to Megalokles – perhaps the *strategos* of the three cities of Tripolis, Azoros, Pythion and Dolichè – and to the κοινόν of Tripolis; with these mis-sives, the king granted the soldiers of the Macedonian army, who had fought in the battle of Sellasia against Cleomenes III, an exemption from a series of civic liturgies.⁷⁵ The publication of the letters was initiated by Proxenos, son of Philippos, presumably one of the beneficiaries, if the hypothesis that his name was listed at the end of the second, fragmentary letter is correct. He obviously had every interest in epigraphically sanctioning his privilege, but the mere inscription of the royal letters was re-functionalized by him in the form of a dedication to the Apollo of Pythion in Thessaly. The dedication inscription is separated from the other texts and placed on the horizontal crowning protruding from the cippus itself: in larger letters, it includes only the name of the dedicator and the name of the deity and dedicatee on two lines (Πρόξενος Φιλίππου Ἀπλλωνι Πυθίωι). In order to create two lines of equal length, the stonecutter deliberately divided the thirty letters of the dedication into two equal parts. Then, ignoring the extravagant outcome of this mathematical operation, in the new line starting with the *gamma* at the end of the dedicator's patronymic, he forgot to insert the *omikron* of Ἀπλλωνι, therefore completely nullifying his attempt to obtain a perfect layout.

Philippos' gratitude towards the divinity and the cippus he produced, through which Apollo himself guarantees the king's decision in the absence of civic protection, allow us to point out, as a conclusion, the effectiveness of the recipient's design. Through different ways and with varied nuances, anyone receiving a royal

⁷³ Boffo 2021, 532–533, n. 86; 539–542, esp. nn. 104–105. Few clues on royal sealing practices are preserved in the Hellenistic epigraphic evidence: cf. Bencivenni 2014, 162–163.

⁷⁴ Bosnakis and Hallof 2020, 313.

⁷⁵ Tziafalias and Helly 2010, 104–117, no. IV, and 123, fig. 8 (cf. *SEG* LX 586).

letter and setting a version of it in stone was able to bring the king's word and his overwhelming authority back into the margins of the material medium and visually contain it therein. Emerging through the empty spaces left on the stone surface, the king's voice resonated in service of the recipient's own interests.

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