

CAPInv. 1047: **Molpoi**

I. LOCATION

i. Geographical area	Western Asia Minor
ii. Region	Ionia
iii. Site	Miletus

II. NAME

i. Full name (original language)	Μολποί (Milet I.3 133)
ii. Full name (transliterated)	<i>Molpoi</i>

III. DATE

i. Date(s)	l. vi BC - l. i AD
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IV. NAME AND TERMINOLOGY

ii. Name elements	Cultic:	The name Μολποί, <i>Molpoi</i> , is derived from μολπή, <i>molpe</i> , "song, dance" and describes the members of the association as (cultic) dancers and singers. Cf. Herda 2006: 80.
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V. SOURCES

i. Source(s)	Milet I.3 133 Milet I.3 134
Note	For other editions of the texts see the bibliographies in Milet VI.1 133; 134. Herda 2006 reedited and commented extensively Milet I.3 133.
i.a. Source type(s)	Epigraphic source(s)

i.b. Document(s) typology & language/script	Milet I.3 133, the famous <i>Molpoi</i>-statute, is a sacred law with regulations for different aspects of the cult of Apollon Delphinios. It was inscribed in the Hellenistic period, probably the early 2nd century, but the regulations go back to the late Archaic and early Classical period. Milet I.3 134 is a decree of the Milesians from the late first c. AD with new regulations concerning inter alia the <i>Molpoi</i>. Milet I.3 122-128 are the lists of the Milesian <i>aisymnetai/stephanephoroi</i>, reaching – with gaps – from the early 5th c. BC to the 1st c. AD. <i>Aisymnetai/stephanephoroi</i> are mentioned in many other inscriptions from Miletus and Didyma. Greek.
i.c. Physical format(s)	Milet I.3 133: Blueish marble stele. Milet I.3.134: White marble stele.
ii. Source(s) provenance	Milet I.3 133: Delphinion, reused in the pavement. Milet I.3 134: Delphinion

VI. BUILT AND VISUAL SPACE

ii. References to buildings/objects	The sacred law Milet I.3, 133 mentions several times a <i>Μολπών</i>, <i>Molpon</i> (Il. 12, 17, 20, 43). According to some commentators, this <i>Molpon</i> is the clubhouse of the <i>Molpoi</i> and probably identical with the Milesian <i>prytaneion</i> (Herda 2006: index s.v.). This interpretation, however, is controversial, and the <i>Molpon</i> is probably better understood as the designation of the ritual performed by the <i>Molpoi</i> (Chaniotis 2010).
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VII. ORGANIZATION

ii. Leadership	αἰσυμνήτης, <i>aisymnetes</i> The <i>aisymnetes</i>, also called στεφανήφορος, <i>stephanephoros</i>, is the chairman of the cult association and also the eponymous magistrate of the <i>polis</i>. He held his office for a year. The duties and privileges of the <i>aisymnetes</i> during the festival of Apollon Delphinios are described in detail in the <i>Molpoi</i>-statute. According to Milet I.3 134 from late i. c. AD, the <i>stephanephoros</i> was obliged to offer banquets to the <i>Molpoi</i>. Eponymous office The αἰσυμνήτης, <i>aisymnetes</i>, or στεφανήφορος, <i>stephanephoros</i>, is the eponymous official of Miletus.
iv. Officials	προσέταιροι, <i>prosetairoi</i> Together with the <i>aisymnetes</i>, the <i>Molpoi</i>-statute mentions five <i>prosetairoi</i>, "companions", as leaders of the association. They belong to three of the six ancient <i>phylai</i> of Miletus. As Herda 2006: 31-34 plausibly suggests, three of the six <i>phylai</i> designated two representatives (one for each <i>chilastys</i>). One acted as <i>aisymnetes</i>, the others as his <i>prosetairoi</i>. After half a year or rather a year, member of the other three <i>phylai</i> took charge of the offices. According to Herda 2006, the <i>aisymnetes</i> and the <i>prosetairoi</i> were the Milesian <i>prytaneis</i>, but there is in fact little evidence for this view (Chaniotis 2010).
v. Other staff	The <i>Molpoi</i>-statute also mentions a ἱέρκεως, <i>hierkeos</i>. His status within the association is not clear. A group called the <i>Onitadai</i>, which probably formed their own association (cf. CAPInv. 1046) – rather than being a subgroup of the <i>Molpoi</i> –, supported the <i>Molpoi</i> in the cultic activities.

vi. Laws and rules

The *Molpoi*-statute documents a complex set of regulations for the rites (ὄργια, *orgia*) and festival celebrations of Apollon Delphinion. The statute goes back to late Archaic times but additions were made in the first half of the fifth century. The regulations must still have been valid in the 2nd c. BC, when the *Molpoi* decided to inscribe them.

In the late first century AD, a decree not by the *Molpoi*, but by the Milesian people confirmed at least partially the ancient duties and privileges of the *Molpoi*.

VIII. PROPERTY AND POSSESSIONS

i. Treasury/Funds

It is obvious from the *Molpoi*-statute that the association administered substantial resources. They received them, at least partially, from the *polis*, but sacrifices in the Delphinion were probably also a source of income.

iii. Income

cf. above i. Treasury/funds.

IX. MEMBERSHIP

ii. Gender

Men
Women

Note

The *Molpoi* seemed to have been predominantly male. As *aisymnetai*, however, acted also several women, at least in the Roman period.

iv. Status

In the Archaic period, the members of the *Molpoi* probably constituted the ruling oligarchy of Miletus. They lost most of their political power after the Persian wars, but membership always seemed to have retained highest reputation. This is proven by the fact that leading figures from Alexander the Great and Demetrios Poliorketes to the emperor Augustus acted as *aisymnetes/stephanephoros*.

X. ACTIVITIES

i. Assemblies

The *Molpoi* themselves decided (in the 5th c. BC) to enact the regulations in the *Molpoi*-statute. In the early 2nd c. BC they decided again themselves, without visible involvement of the people and most probably in their own assembly, to set up the *Molpoi*-statute in the early 2nd c. BC as an inscription in the Delphinion.

iii. Worship

The *Molpoi* were, first of all, worshipers of Apollon Delphinios. On certain occasions, however, they worshipped other gods as well (Hestia, Hekate, Hermes, the nymphai, heroes, the θεοὶ ἐντεμένοι, *theoi entemenoi*, of the Delphinion).

The *Molpoi* played the central role in the festivities regulated in detail by the *Molpoi*-statute. They were also the most important actors in the yearly procession to Didyma, the most important public festival of Miletus.

Deities worshipped

Apollon Delphinios
Hestia
Hekate
Hermes
Nymphae
Heroes

iv. Honours/Other activities

According to documents dating ca. 200 BC (Milet I.3 143 l. 32; 146 l. 42; 150 l. 66), the *Molpoi* seem to have acted as a court (maybe only for preliminary proceedings) in litigations about the civic status.

XII. NOTES

i. Comments

Almost all information we have about the *Molpoi* is derived from the so-called *Molpoi*-statute (Milet I.3 133). The interpretation of this document is difficult and controversial. By far the largest part of this text is concerned with rituals of the festival of Apollon which started on the 7th day of the month and continued to the 10th.

According to Herda's extensive re-interpretation of the text (Herda 2006; 2011), this celebration was the Milesian New Year festival in which the inauguration of the new *aisymnetes* and *prosetairoi* took a central place. Chaniotis 2010, however, identified critical flaws in Herda's interpretation of the text, which make his overall interpretation *de facto* untenable. With that, however, many central questions remain, again, open. Older interpretations of the text, which left many problems unsolved as well, are summarized in Poland 1935.

The exact nature of the *Molpoi* as an organization is still not clear. While they show features of a private cult association – ὄργιονες, *orgiones*, according to Herda 2006: 35-37 – they also play a central role in the Milesian *polis* and seem to be rather a public board of the state than a private association.

iii. Bibliography

Chaniotis, A. (2010), 'The Molpoi Inscription: Ritual Prescription or Riddle?', *Kernos* 23, 2010, 375-9.
Herda, A. (2006), *Der Apollon-Delphinios-Kult in Milet und die Neujahrsprozession nach Didyma* (Milesische Forschungen 4). Mainz.
Herda, A. (2011), 'How to Run a State Cult. The Organization of the Cult of Apollo Delphinios in Miletos', in M. Haysom and J. Wallensten (eds.), *Current Approaches to Religion in Ancient Greece*. Stockholm: 57-93.
Poland, F. (1935), Μολποί, *RE* Suppl. VI: 509-520.

XIII. EVALUATION

i. Private association

Possible

Note

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