Chapter 4

The Spatial Environment of Inscriptions and Graffiti in Domestic Spaces: The Case of Delos

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Introduction

The port-city of Delos became an important commercial base connecting the eastern and western Mediterranean after 167 BCE, when the Romans made it a “duty free” port under Athenian dominion.1 Delos was home of the sanctuary of Apollo since the archaic period and, due to its advantageous geographical position in the center of the Aegean world, commanded a huge cult network that intertwined religious with economic and political activities. After the grant of the statute of ateleia by the Roman senate, Delos became an intermediary in Rome’s commercial relations with the Hellenistic East and attracted merchants from the Italian peninsula, western and southern Asia Minor as well as from places further abroad.2 In order to house the growing population,3 the small settlement that clustered around the main sanctuary area expanded and new residential neighborhoods

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1 Hatzfeld 1912; Zalesskij 1982; Reger 1994.
2 Tréheux gives 68 ethnics from Antioch, 64 from Berytos, 2 from Laodicea in Phoenicia, 47 from Alexandria, 35 from Laodicea in Syria, 32 from Hieropolis, 31 from Tyre, 23 from Sidon, 16 from Ascalon and 12 from Salamis: Tréheux 1992. The largest ethnic contingent of the island was, however, Roman-Italian. Hatzfeld estimated that of 231 Rhomaioi recorded on the island, 88 were freeborn, 95 were liberti, and 48 were slaves. Rauh’s survey in 1993 of inscriptions published since 1919 contains an additional 300 Rhomaioi whose names can be split, in similar proportions to those found by Hatzfeld, between freeborn (118 or 40%) and slave-born (freenmen and slaves combined, 182 or 60%): Hatzfeld 1912. See discussion in Rauh 1993, 30–32.
3 From a population of about 1,500 to 2,000 in the period of the independence, it gained an estimated amount of 20,000 to 30,000 at its peak, during the period of the second Athenian dominion. See: Rauh 1993, 27. However there is no firm evidence—incriptions give evidence for 1,200 citizens and a population of about 6,000 at the beginning of the first century BCE.
were created. The new neighborhoods developed around the sanctuary center and where good natural ports were created to complement the activities of the main port, overloaded by the maritime traffic going through the island in this period.

After the sacks of 88 and 69 CE by the troops of Mithridates and the pirate Athenadoros, however, Delos ceased to be an economic center. Triarius, the legatus of Lucullus stationed on the island, built a wall in 69 BCE in order to protect the island from the pirate Athenadoros. The wall of Triarius reduced the settlement around the area of the sanctuary. Delos was occupied through the imperial period and, after a prosperous period between the end of the 3rd century CE and the beginning of the 7th century CE, was in the following centuries ruined and deserted. Due to the abandonment of the island, the houses of the late Hellenistic period have been well preserved even though Delos was an inexhaustible resource for marble and stone for the surrounding islands. Excavated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Delian houses are prime examples of Hellenistic housing.

Studies of the Delian houses have hitherto focused on typological analyses of their architecture and have not attempted to contextualize writing in private space. This paper discusses stone inscriptions and graffiti found in the late Hellenistic houses of Delos. In discussing their location

4 On urban growth of the island during this period see: Bruneau 1968; Papageorgiou-Venetas 1981. On the port and dockside structures see also: Duchène and Fraisse 2001. The comprehensive study on the urban growth of the island by Papageorgiou-Venetas (1981) has been rightly criticized for misapplying modern urban planning principles and quantitative methods: Scranton 1982; Bruneau 1984; Kreeb 1984.

5 Bruneau 1968, 658–664.

6 Maillot 2005.

7 Orlandos 1936; Kiourtzian 2000, 47–60.

8 Delos was ravaged in 727 by the iconoclast emperor Leo the Isaurian, in 769 by the Slaves and in 829 by the Saracens coming from Crete (the Arab inscription in the Porticus of Philip attests their passage—wrongly dated according to Bruneau and Ducat, 2005). On the graffiti from this period, see Vallois 1923, 167–169.


10 For an overview of the scholarship see: Zarmakoupi 2013a, “The study of the Delian houses.”