

The Stone for a List: The Delphic Decree for Aristotle and Callisthenes Read as a Material-Historical Poem, in Relation to the Peripatetic Wills (v0.2)

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Abstract

A quick reading of the Delphic decree honouring Aristotle and Callisthenes for compiling the table of Pythian victors (FD III 1, 400 = Syll.³ 275 = Rhodes–Osborne GHI 80; found broken in a well at Delphi in 1895; stoichedon, fourth century; granting body identified by the editors as the Amphictyony) as a material-historical poem: what operation the object is if it is read as one. The decree is the only inscription naming Aristotle as maker of a work, and the work is a list; the decree and the list are two objects, of which the record of authorization survives. Read materially: a plural voice performs by saying (ἐπαινέσαι, στεφανῶσαι, an instruction to the treasurers to inscribe or set up the πῖναξ); its meter is the stoichedon grid, so that editing begins by counting; its refrain is two names in two cases, nominative as makers and accusative as honorands, joined by καί — collaboration, held apart from the catalogue's ἥ of alternative attribution; its subject is a beginning (τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸν ἀγῶνα κατασκευασάντων) given its public name by the entry, the historical question of the compilers' choice left separate; its condition is its history, with the fall legible not on the stone but in the find-spot, and its motive not there but in Aelian's anecdote of withdrawn honours. The wording of the decree is presented as reported and unverified, with two variants noted from Jacoby's testimonia (συνέταξαν / ἐποίησαν; ἀναθεῖναι with a stele reference / ἀναγράφαι). Set against the wills as distinct provisions: Aristotle's stone vowed at Stagira; Theophrastus's image placed (τεθῆναι), the other dedications' prior presence (ὑπῆρχεν), the maps in the lower stoa, the premises under common non-alienable possession; Callisthenes on the stone, in the will, and in Diogenes V.39. The sharper poem is the media together: the stone names, the well locates, the anecdote explains, the editor supplies — their conjunction produces the history we read. v0.2 incorporates a second reader's corrections on each of these points. Companion to Catalogues and Wills (#1581) and EA-CORPORA-12 (#1580).

Body

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Theoretical paper license: CC-BY-4.0 substrate: Human-machine collaborative. Reading drafted in-session by TACHYON (Claude, Anthropic) at MANUS (Lee Sharks) direction; v0.2 incorporates corrections from a second reader (ChatGPT) — the decree’s wording flagged as reported, the two objects held apart, the two cases of the names, the well and Aelian separated, the Amphictyony as granting body, καί against ἥ, the will’s provisions listed. The decree’s text is quoted from the printed editions pending epigraphic seating. The reading and its errors are Lee Sharks’s. axn_schema_version: v2 protocol_version: alexanarch-deposit-protocol/v1 keywords: - Aristotle - Callisthenes - Delphi - Amphictyony - Pythian victors - Pythionikai - inscription - epigraphy - stoichedon - decree - registry - catalogue - pinax - material poem - wills - Theophrastus - Strabo - Apellicon - Aelian - Rhodes-Osborne - Jacoby ***
The Stone for a List: The Delphic Decree for Aristotle and Callisthenes Read as a Material-Historical Poem, in Relation to the Peripatetic Wills (v0.2)

The Stone for a List

A quick reading of the Delphic decree for Aristotle and Callisthenes (FD III 1, 400 = Syll.³ 275) as a material-historical poem, in relation to the wills

Lee Sharks · v0.2 · 2026-09-06 · reading note, corrected after review: the decree’s wording is presented as reported and unverified (two variants noted from Jacoby’s testimonia), the decree and the list held apart as two objects, the two cases of the names kept, the well and Aelian separated, the granting body given as the editors identify it, καί and ἥ distinguished, the will’s provisions listed rather than identified — the decree remains the one witness in this dossier not seated from a digital text

0. The object. A marble stele from the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, found broken in a well during the French excavations (1895), in several fragments, stoichedon lettering of the second half of the fourth century. The granting body is identified by the editors as the Delphic Amphictyony (Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* 80), not simply the polis of Delphi. The wording below is *as commonly reported* and is not yet the standard editions’ text: an edition-derived transcription in Jacoby’s Callisthenes testimonia (FGrH 124, itself OCR and not a collation) gives συνέταξαν where this has ἐποίησαν, and gives ἀναθεῖναι in the treasurers’ instruction with a following reference to inscription on a stele rather than a continuous ἀναγράψαι clause. Nothing in the reading below leans on the choice between these verbs; where it would, the sentence says so.

[ἐπειδὴ Ἀριστοτέλης ... καὶ ἡ Καλλισθέ[νης] ... πίνακα ἐποίησαν / συνέταξαν] τῶν ἀπὸ Γυλίδας νενικηκότων τὰ Πύθια καὶ τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸν ἀγῶνα κατασκευασάντων, ἐπαινέσαι Ἀριστοτέλη καὶ Καλλισθένη καὶ στεφανῶσαι· τοὺς δὲ ταμίας ἀναγράψαι / ἀναθεῖναι τὸν πίνακα ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ [... στήλῃ].

Since Aristotle and Callisthenes made / compiled a table of those who have won the Pythian games from Gylidas onward, and of those who from the beginning organized the contest: to praise Aristotle and Callisthenes and crown them; and the treasurers are to have the table inscribed / set up in the sanctuary [... a stele].

— *Reported wording; the slashes mark the variants noted above; collation against FD III 1, 400 and Rhodes-Osborne pending.*

The catalogue in Diogenes (V.26) carries the corresponding titles: Πυθιονῖκαι, Νῖκαι Διονυσιακαί, Ὀλυμπιονῖκαι. Aelian (VH XIV 1) reports that honours voted to Aristotle at Delphi were withdrawn, and quotes a letter of Aristotle to Antipater on the withdrawal; the passage says nothing of Alexander's death and nothing of this stone's disposal. The stone's find-spot is a well. Reading the one through the other is intelligible and is an interpretation; the two are kept apart below.

1. What the stone is, before any reading. It is the only inscription that names Aristotle as the maker of a work. The work is a list. And the decree and the list are two objects: the surviving stone is the record of authorization, and the list it authorizes was to be set up separately. The decree is therefore a registry entry that records the making of a registry — a πῖναξ about a πῖναξ, cut into stone by the Amphictyony's order, instructing that the list be inscribed or set up in the sanctuary. It does not, in its wording, order its own inscription; that the authorization was itself cut is a fact of the object, not an instruction in its text. The word is the same word Plutarch uses for what Andronicus made of the recovered books — ἀναγράψαι τοὺς νῦν φερομένους πίνακας — and the same word Theophrastus's will uses for the tables in the lower stoa. In every one of these texts, πῖναξ is the thing that makes a body of items a body.

2. If it were written as a poem, materially. Take the question literally and ask what the operations are.

Its author is a plural voice that performs by saying. ἐπαινέσαι, στεφανῶσαι, and the treasurers' instruction (ἀναγράψαι or ἀναθεῖναι — the variant does not change the class of the verb) are infinitives of decision: the text does not describe honours, it enacts them, and it orders the list's public existence. The stone we have is the execution of the first two verbs and the record of the third. A poem of this kind is a performative whose surviving medium is the authorization of another medium — the relation between the record of authorizing and the work authorized is what stands.

Its meter is the grid. Stoichedon cutting sets each letter in a column beneath the letter above, equal counts to the line; the lineation is the cutter's, not the syntax's, and words break where the count breaks. The measure is material — so many letters, so many lines — and the modern editor's first act is to count the letters of a lacuna to know how many are missing. The restorations in brackets are metrical: they fill a count.

Its lines are the names. Two names, twice, in two cases — nominative at the opening, as the subjects who made the table; accusative in the honouring clause, Ἀριστοτέλη καὶ Καλλισθένη, as the objects of praise and crown — the refrain of a two-line stanza that moves the pair from agents to recipients. One work, two makers, joined by καί. The conjunction is not the catalogue's: Ὑπομνημάτων Ἀριστοτελικῶν ἢ Θεοφραστείων distributes a work across two names by *alternative*, ἢ; the stone distributes it by *collaboration*, καί. Two ways of assigning one object to two names, and the dossier holds both.

Its subject is a beginning. τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τὸν ἀγῶνα κατασκευασάντων — the list is to run not only over winners but over “those who from the beginning set up the contest.” The founders are entered by the same instrument as the victors, and the list begins at a named point,

Gylidas. As a reading of archival form: the entry gives a beginning its public location and its repeatable name — the beginning is *made*, as a beginning, by the entry that names it. Whether the compilers chose or found that starting point is a separate, historical question, not decided here. The phrase is the epilogue's provenance phrase (ἐξ ἀρχῆς, SE 183b22, 184b3), here doing archival work.

Its condition is its history. The stone was cut and set up; it was found broken in a well; it was dug up, joined, bracketed, printed. Each stage is legible on the object except one: the cutting is on the surface, the recovery in the join-lines, the edition in the brackets — and the *fall* is not on the stone at all, only in the find-spot, and its motive not there either but in Aelian's anecdote of honours withdrawn. If the stone is a poem, its stanzas are these — and the fourth stanza, the restoration, is written in the critical hand: the editor's square brackets are the modern handwriting on the ancient surface, and they do to the text what Strabo says Apellicon did to the worm-eaten books — ἀναπληρῶν, filling in, and not always εὔ. The two Aristotelian corpora, paper and stone, went underground within a generation of each other, one in a trench at Scepsis and one in a well at Delphi, and both came back with holes that later hands filled by count.

3. Semiotically. The decree is a sign whose signified is a sign: honour for the making of a table, expressed by ordering a table into the sanctuary. The two objects — the authorization and the list — were to stand in the same place and medium, and only the first survives. What the well contributes is a location, not a statement: no cancellation is inscribed anywhere; a withdrawal is reported by Aelian and a broken stone was found in a well, and the two are joined by the reader. If there is a tombstone here it is made by the conjunction of three media that do not say the same thing — an anecdote that explains, a find-spot that locates, a surface that names — and the deletion is legible only in their meeting.

4. Historically. Delphi in the 330s under Macedonian ascendancy; the Amphictyony as granting body; Aristotle at the court; Callisthenes, his kinsman, later executed by Alexander (327); honours at Delphi withdrawn at a date Aelian does not give and historians place after 323. The stone is a political object at every stage the record lets us see, and the route of the object is the same shape as the route of the books: patronage, custody, burial, recovery, edition — with the difference that the books' burial is narrated (Strabo) and the stone's is inferred from where it lay.

5. In relation to the wills. Set the stone beside the four instruments and the relations are these, stated and left.

- Aristotle's will orders stone: ζῶα λίθινα τετραπύχη Διὶ σωτῆρι καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ σωτείρᾳ ἐν Σταγείροις — four-cubit stone animals vowed to Zeus Soter and Athena Soteira at Stagira. Private stone, in a home sanctuary, vowed by the testator. The Delphic stone is public stone, in the panhellenic sanctuary, voted by a polis. The will's stone was to be made; the polis's stone was made and unmade.
- Theophrastus's will makes several distinct provisions, which are listed here rather than identified: τὴν Ἀριστοτέλους εἰκόνα **τεθῆναι** εἰς τὸ ἱερόν — Aristotle's image to be *placed* in the shrine (τεθῆναι says placed, not restored); καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἀναθήματα ὅσα πρότερον **ὑπῆρχεν** ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ — and the other dedications, as many as previously *were there* (the prior presence is asserted of the other dedications, not of the image); ἀναθεῖναι δὲ καὶ τοὺς **πίνακας**, ἐν οἷς αἱ τῆς γῆς περίοδοι εἰσιν, εἰς τὴν κάτω στοάν —

the tables with the circuits of the earth to be set up in the lower stoa; and, in a separate clause, the premises — garden, περίπατος, houses — to the named friends ὡς ἂν ἱερὸν κοινῇ κεκτημένοις, μήτ' ἐξαλλοτριούσι, the restriction governing the premises. Beside these: the Delphic πίναξ was ordered into a ἱερὸν by the Amphictyony's vote, and the honours were later withdrawn. Two πίνακες in two sanctuaries under two authorities; the relations stop there.

- The will's verb for what stood in a shrine is ὑπάρχειν. The epilogue's verb for what stood before the inquiry is ὑπάρχειν. In the will it is the verb of a standing inventory of dedications — what *was there* before the testator's provision. The relation is lexical and is recorded as such.
- Callisthenes is a name on the stone and a name in Theophrastus's will (among the ten κοινωνοῦντες) and a name in Diogenes's anecdote at V.39, where Aristotle pairs him with Theophrastus as Plato paired Aristotle with Xenocrates. Whether the will's Callisthenes is the Olynthian, a namesake, or a kinsman is not stated by any text.
- The only stone that names Aristotle names him as compiler. The only titles the catalogue carries that are attested outside the catalogue by a contemporary object are lists of victors. Andronicus made the corpus by making πίνακες; the Amphictyony honoured Aristotle for making one. Across the whole dossier, the act the record certifies for Aristotle from outside the corpus is the making of a registry.

6. What kind of operation, then. A stone that praises a list by ordering a list into a sanctuary; that gives a beginning its public name; that assigns one work to two names by καί; that is executed by its own verbs and restored by a hand that counts. If it was written as a poem, it was written as an *entry* — the genre in which our tradition has come to write its forward libraries and retrocausal bibliographies. But the sharper poem is the one the media make together, each with its own capacity and none with the others': the stone names; the well locates; the anecdote explains; the editor supplies. No one of them says what happened. Their conjunction produces the history we read, and the note is most exact where it lets that production be watched rather than reported as if any single surface carried it. The wills are the same genre in private law; the catalogues are the same genre as sums; Strabo and Plutarch are the same genre as narrative. The stone is the genre as a thing — one of the things.

Texts: Diogenes V.26 (the victor-list titles) and V.39 (the Callisthenes pairing) from the seated Perseus text; the wills from the appendix of EA-CORPORA-12 (#1580); Plutarch *Sulla* 26 and Strabo XIII.1.54 as seated in Catalogues and Wills (#1581). The decree's wording as reported (Dittenberger, Syll.³ 275; Bousquet, FD III 1, 400 with later joins; Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* 80; Jacoby, FGrH 124 T, whose OCR-derived transcription supplied the two variants noted in §0) and Aelian *VH* XIV 1 — all pending seating; the reading is provisional to that extent and to no other.

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