



XVII CONGRESSVS INTERNATIONALIS EPIGRAPHIÆ GRÆCÆ ET LATINÆ

BONONIÆ MMXXVII | 30th August– 4th September 2027

Panel 22: The Raw Materials of Epigraphic Materiality

Chairs: Jonathan Prag, Anna Gutiérrez Garcia-Moreno

In recent years, attention has increasingly focused upon the monumentality and display of epigraphy. The theme was central to the Berlin epigraphic congress in 2012 and other recent collective works (Eck and Funke 2014; Sears *et al.* 2013). More generally, the so-called ‘material turn’ (and also the ‘spatial turn’) in historical and archaeological research has intensified the focus upon the importance of material objects in historical interpretation (Riello 2022, Pitts and Versluys 2021), and epigraphic materiality is now a subject in its own right (Petrovic *et al.* 2019). However, this increased emphasis on texts as objects has yet to see a systematic focus on the underlying materials themselves, as opposed to their broader materiality.

In this panel, we wish to direct attention more specifically on the actual material qualities of inscriptions, as an aspect which has been very largely overlooked to date (e.g. absent from all three publications cited above). The exploitation and significance, both economic and cultural, of stone, particularly in the Roman world is increasingly well understood (e.g. Russell 2013, Taelman 2022). The essential, if complex, application of archaeometric methods of analysis has brought the necessary rigour and precision to such study, which is fundamentally interdisciplinary and collaborative. However, such work has overwhelmingly focused upon the choice of stone in architectural and sculptural contexts: epigraphic studies are extremely rare (1.6% of the data collected in the review by Taelman 2022), and in most cases are incidental to a broader study of stone-use in a particular context. In much epigraphic study, stone identification is vague, imprecise, and frequently misleading or simply incorrect.

The choice of stone matters from multiple perspectives: aesthetics, availability, and suitability (Russell 2013: 8–36; Rockwell 1993: 15–30). Such choices are freighted with economic and social consequence (cost, social pressures, craft traditions, etc.). The rise in use of coloured ‘marbles’ in the Roman period more generally is well documented, but the extent to which this plays out in epigraphic display has only been explored to a very limited extent, above all in the Iberian peninsula (e.g. Mayer 2012, Gorostidi 2020, Rodà *et al.* 2023, Gorostidi *et al.* 2025). The wider picture, whether regional variation in the Roman world, or the potentially completely different practices of different periods, regions, and epigraphic cultures of the ancient world remain very largely unexplored (Prag *et al.* 2026, for a preliminary study in Sicilian epigraphy).

This ‘hard’ materiality is not, however, limited to choices of stone: the selection and use of pigments in the decorating of epigraphic texts (‘rubrication’) is a no less fundamental





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aspect of both their physical form and their economic and social significance. Moreover, the choice of pigments used must be considered in association with the stone itself: both must be understood as parts of a single, coherent epigraphic project. Despite the increasing emphasis upon the importance of colour in the ancient world (Østergaard 2017), study of the use of colour in inscriptions specifically is also still in its infancy (Rebuffat 1995, Campbell 2020, Coccato *et al.* 2024). Yet here too, choices of pigments have very clear social, economic, and aesthetic consequences.

In this panel we invite contributions on all aspects of materials use in lapidary epigraphy, in the hope of initiating a new field of discussion, for which truly collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches are essential. Potential contributions may address any aspect of this ‘hard’ materiality with reference to any period or language of the epigraphic cultures of the ancient Greco-Roman world, broadly conceived, but all contributions must address the contribution which the close study of materials can make to our understanding of epigraphic culture.

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