



# XVII CONGRESSVS INTERNATIONALIS EPIGRAPHIÆ GRÆCÆ ET LATINÆ

BONONIÆ MMXXVII | 30<sup>th</sup> August – 4<sup>th</sup> September 2027

## Panel 10: Commercial Epigraphy Law and Economy from Below (3rd c. BCE – 4th c. CE)

Chairs: Emilia Mataix Ferrándiz, Roberto D. Melfi

Commercial inscriptions — *dipinti*, *tituli picti*, stamps, graffiti, and other texts on containers and goods — offer a unique window into ancient Mediterranean trade, particularly in Greek and Roman contexts, where different legal traditions (and cultures), institutional frameworks, and epigraphic habits shaped the circulation of goods. Beyond their documentary value, they reveal the interplay between official norms and informal practices developed by merchants, professional groups (as *collegia* and *koina*), and local communities. Law becomes visible, especially in the Roman world, not only through statutes and juristic texts, but also through procedures of control, attribution of responsibility, and enforcement embedded in the daily handling and circulation of merchandise. In the Greek world, to the other side, comparable forms of normativity emerge through civic regulation, decrees, inter-polis agreements including commercial clauses in treaties – all generally categorizable as *synthekai*, *symbola*, *proxeniai* and *syngraphai*, in the broadest and most general sense of the term – that govern access to markets, ports, and trading rights.

This panel adopts a broad chronological scope to capture the range of legal and economic changes that shaped Mediterranean epigraphic cultures over time. The presence, absence, and variation of commercial inscriptions across regions point to the coexistence of multiple legal cultures. They suggest the emergence of a shared commercial language, expressed through formulas, weight marks, symbols, and other conventions that served as operational standards in which it is possible to glimpse the practical application of the legislation. These standards facilitated communication, built trust, and allowed diverse actors from different backgrounds to connect, negotiate and enforce transactions. When read alongside archaeological and iconographic evidence, such inscriptions help reconstruct the full cycle of commercial practices from departure to destination.

We welcome papers exploring how the close study of ancient sources epigraphic, documentary, and archaeological has transformed our understanding of commerce, especially in relation to legal and normative pluralism, standardization, and diversity. The panel also aims to reevaluate monumental inscriptions that have rarely been studied from the perspective of trading actors and port operations (*i.e.*, epigraphy and law “from below”), opening new readings of texts linked to markets, *agorai* and *fora*, and professional





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groups, as well as port facilities, taxes and treaties which illuminate the legal and economic frameworks of the ancient trade.

In addition, we seek to reassess the historiography of commercial epigraphy, particularly the category of *instrumentum domesticum*, long marginalized in scholarship. Many of these texts were published in 19th-century corpora such as the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* but have not been systematically reexamined, contextualized, or relocated within their archaeological settings. Revisiting these corpora and regional studies for the Greek world (where commercial inscriptions on containers, weights, and goods are dispersed across regional corpora and thematic publications; such as the amphora stamps of Thasos) —alongside new finds—offers the opportunity to integrate commercial inscriptions into wider debates on law, economy, and society and to reassess the interaction between inter-polis normativity, imperial legal regimes and civic regulation across the ancient Mediterranean.

This panel is especially timely within the framework of the XVII CIEGL. It foregrounds the contribution of “minor” inscriptions to major historical questions; brings together epigraphists, legal historians, and archaeologists; and highlights the coexistence and interaction of multiple legal and normative traditions with civic and inter-polis regulatory practices beyond the hybridization of Roman law in the provinces, where local practices intersected with imperial norms.

Possible paper topics include, but are not limited to:

## **Epigraphy, mobility, and material practice:**

- Epigraphy of *instrumentum inscriptum* and mobility of objects;
- Standardization in commercial epigraphy;
- Material agency and trade;
- New and old *instrumenta inscripta*;
- Production, seriality, and economic cycles (stamps, *tituli picti*, repeated formulas).

## **Law, standardization, and normativity:**

- Standardization in production and commercial epigraphy as legal and procedural practice;
- Writing technologies and their impact on regulation, control, and responsibility;
- Legal pluralism and the interaction of civic, customary, and imperial norms.

## **Knowledge transmission and language**

- Knowledge transmission across commercial networks. Multilingualism and the spread of standardized formulas
- Interactions between legal languages and local epigraphic practices

## **Spaces and practices:**

- Port infrastructures and their links to legal–economic activity;
- Representations of commerce: inscriptions, paintings, and monuments;
- Production and seriality (*stamps, tituli picti, inscriptions*) as evidence for economic cycles;





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- Use and reuse of inscribed objects in secondary contexts (e.g., a wine amphora reused to store honey).

## **Temporalities and transformations:**

- Changes in epigraphic and legal practices from the Republic to Late Antiquity.

By focusing on commercial epigraphy, this panel aims to offer a fresh perspective on the relationship between inscriptions, materiality, and social practice, revealing how epigraphy functioned not merely as record-keeping but as an active instrument of communication, standardization, and regulation in the ancient Mediterranean.

