



XVII CONGRESSVS INTERNATIONALIS EPIGRAPHIÆ GRÆCÆ ET LATINÆ

BONONIÆ MMXXVII | 30th August – 4th September 2027

Panel 12: Epigraphic Cultures in Contact in the Near East (1st c. BCE – 4th c. CE) Interactions, Interferences, Interpretations, and Innovations between Semitic and Classical Epigraphies

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The Near East, a region encompassing the provinces of Syria, Judeo-Palestine, Arabia, and Mesopotamia, produced numerous epigraphic records between the 1st c. BCE and 4th c. CE. Inscriptions were written in a diversity of scripts (Aramaic, Greek, and Latin), expressing vernacular languages (different dialects of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Pahlavi), as well as Imperial (Latin and Greek) and *linguae francae* (Aramaic and Greek). At the same time, the various dialects and scripts of Aramaic were favoured in significant economic, political, and religious centres, such as Palmyra, Hatra, Edessa, and dynamic settlements of the Nabatean Kingdom. Aramaic inscriptions have also been found in other parts of the Empire (Britain, Dacia, Rome, Cappadocia). Such as in Egypt, the coexistence of several languages suggests that multiple distinct audiences were intended to read these inscriptions. It might also indicate that these languages performed well-defined and perceptible functions.

The epigraphic habit in the Near East differed somewhat from the neighbouring Greek-speaking regions, such as the provinces of Asia Minor and Greece. Whereas official inscriptions were common in the epigraphic landscape of the latter, they were rare in the Levant. Such an example emphasises the region's particularity. On the other hand, some categories, including funerary texts, were well represented in both areas, indicating strong similarities. By comparing the specificities of these writing cultures, one can grasp local particularities and understand how these societies expressed their political systems, religions, funerary traditions, personal identities, and concepts. Moreover, cultural and language contacts can be inferred from such a comparative approach: the frequent polyonymy among the inhabitants, the occurrence of diglossia and digraphia, their *interpretatio Graeca* or *Romana* in the religious sphere, the assimilation, adaptation or, on the contrary, the preservation of some words or concepts, represent some of the issues that can be scrutinised. While the process of provincialization, initiated with Pompey's conquest of Syria in 64 BCE, marked a new epigraphic era in the Near East, the dynamic development of Christianity in the 4th c. CE triggered a cultural, social, and political





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revolution, impacting the epigraphic habit and introducing new changes that reshaped the linguistic landscape.

In this workshop, we will explore the complexity of epigraphic cultures in the Near East during the Roman imperial period. Through our panel, we aim to foster discussion of the linguistic situation across the Near East in Roman times, a topic that has received less attention in scholarly debates. In addition to the themes proposed above, we invite speakers to propose new topics or unpublished inscriptions, particularly scholars who have adopted new scientific methods, such as quantitative approaches, digital humanities, or sociolinguistic concepts.

Our exploratory questions are among others:

- interaction between the cultures of writing in stone and communication in imperial languages;
- place of other languages (Aramaic, Hebrew, Ancient North Arabic) beside Greek and Latin;
- the change and continuity of epigraphic habits;
- comparison of the contents in Greek and Latin with the Aramaic texts, reevaluating the role of the latter in the Near East during the Roman imperial period;
- the role of epigraphy in expressing the identity and culture of the indigenous people;
- strategies of choice and use of epigraphic languages depending on the readership;
- case studies: for instance, Palmyra, Dura-Europos, Hatra.

