

## Teaching (with) epigraphy in the digital age

Many students and non-specialists are interested in what ancient Greek and Latin inscriptions have to say. Few know how or where to begin to find what they are looking for. The forbidding folio pages of the standard corpora do little to invite exploration, and traditional print introductions, for all their virtues, deprive inscribed objects of much of their immediacy and appeal.

This paper considers ways that recent advances in digital epigraphy and the accessibility of on-line databases and tools can enhance the use of inscriptions in the classroom and improve the ability of instructors to teach the elements of epigraphy to advanced undergraduates and graduate students in programs without direct access to primary materials. An innovative project at the University of Rome, La Sapienza, makes available a free iPhone application that enables users to send images of inscriptions photographed in the museums and urban environs to the Istituto di Epigrafia at the University, where the images are processed and stored, and a translation and brief commentary on the text are transmitted in return to the sender. We are not yet in a position to replicate this service in North America, but on-line digital repositories of images of inscribed objects in American museum collections not only provide indirect access to a wealth of material but also indicate the possible existence of nearby collections where inscriptions can be examined at first hand, and interactive search tools facilitate access to the vast digital databases of texts of (especially) Latin inscriptions—for those who know where to find them and how to use them.

Navigating successfully the increasingly crowded waters in a sea of digital epigraphy requires a familiarity with the virtues and limitations of the various tools and databases that few researchers are likely to have acquired in the course of their studies, and there exists no generally accessible introductory guide for those new to the material. This paper will lay out for teachers and researchers interested in exploring Greek and Latin inscriptions digitally a rational sequence and method for using the new tools to perform a variety of tasks and a responsible way to understand the data collected.