

## *Carmina Epigraphica*

International research of the last thirty years has begun fundamentally to transform our understanding of the so-called *carmina epigraphica*, inscriptions partly or wholly in verse, rhythmical, or rhetorical/poeticising in style. On the Latin side alone, significant progress has been made towards the publication of the first fascicles of *CIL* XVIII, especially with a view to the evidence from the Iberian peninsula and from Gaul. No fewer than five international conferences on the subject were held in Spain, and a sixth conference was organised in Berlin. Several regional collections of verse inscriptions have been published, and a new addition to the well-known collection of Bücheler and Lommatzsch, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, has been announced. The European Research Council and the Spanish government are currently investing funds in the region of EUR 5,000,000 in this field in projects based and supervised in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, whence over the next few years well over a dozen new PhD projects will emerge and be brought to completion. This is a crucial, paradigm-shifting period for our field of research, and we must seize this unique opportunity to take stock, bring together scholars representative of a number of different approaches to the evidence, and outline the tenets and new avenues of our research in this important area of epigraphic research.

Historically often treated as an annex to 'real' epigraphy, generously left to the philologists (who did not fully appreciate the value of this body of evidence, but relegated these texts to the fine print of their literary histories, if they mentioned them at all), recent initiatives have begun to reconceptualise the evidence base and explore their value for a fundamentally renewed and refined understanding of the *carmina epigraphica* as manifestations of a cultural practice that is subject to currents or trends on a local and global scale, reflecting the social stratigraphy and cultural and linguistic diversity of the people(s) of the ancient Mediterranean, both in static and in mobile communities. The comparatively small, but well-known group of literary poets and the vast number of anonymous authors of inscribed poetry shared common socio-cultural spaces, drew from a common iconography, lived under the same legislative framework, inhabited identical urban and rural landscapes. Conversely, their artistic creations are manifestations of the same practice, created under identical conditions, with many overlaps, interdependencies, and cross-fertilisations. And in this scenario, we even benefit from the fact that most epigraphic poems were not (exclusively) subject to altering manuscript traditions, but to the present day reflect the characteristics and conditions of the societies in which, and for which, they were generated, in all their socio-cultural and economic varieties.

As a result of this, we are now at an important threshold in our field, and it is time emphatically to cross it: understanding our evidence base as an expression of a shared, universal practice, it is time to advance our research on the verse inscriptions on the basis of their language, currently running parallel and without significant overlap, into research into the communal artistic practice of societies and communities across the *oikoumene* with full appreciation of their co-existence, interaction, and cross-fertilisation processes. In other words: what at the XV<sup>th</sup> CIEGL event at Vienna effectively had been a session with two almost independent strands, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca et Latina*, must become an organic, integrated session of *Carmina Epigraphica Antiqua* research, for the benefit of future generations of scholars finally being enabled to see beyond the narrow disciplinary confines and in order fully to do justice to the realities of a multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural world.

Considering quantity and quality of the evidence, as well as the need to advance a debate that for too long has been stuck in a linguistic divide, we therefore invite contributions towards a session that will bring together (a) scholars representing the study of Greek and Latin verse inscriptions, respectively, (b) scholars representing different schools of thought on the matter, and (c) scholars, representing different generations of research in our field, to ensure lively and fruitful exchange of ideas.

### **Heads of the sections**

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