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Narrating epigraphy in the sites of the ancient city: a digital project for the epigraphic landscape of Athens

(…) And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."
P. B. Shelley, *Ozymandias*

1. Untold stories: a problem of communication

When we have the chance to visit a gallery of inscriptions in a museum (let alone a specifically epigraphic one!) we might well feel like Shelley's poem's lone traveller, although in an only metaphoric desert, such as the almost total absence of visitors. That is a "late *contrappasso*" for inscriptions[1]: documents whose main function was to preserve and convey a message to citizens and readers are now particularly difficult to communicate to a non-specialized audience, thus having almost no readers at all[2].

This is due to a wide range of problems, from simple reading to interpretation: in fact, just to read an ancient inscription we must possess quite specific skills, such as an excellent knowledge of Latin and Greek, the ability to identify different alphabetic signs and to deal with various writing practices; then, even if

[1] Cf. Sartori 2009, 65.

[2] This consideration is surprisingly not so common among epigraphers; among the few contributions who highlighted the problem cf. Sartori 2009, 65-69; Baratta 2009, 85-89; Caruso 2021, 16-20.

we had a transcription (or a translation, which is surprisingly rare), we would still need a very good understanding of history and institutions to grasp the deeper meanings of the text. Apart from the difficulties posed by the documents themselves, some scholars have recently suggested that the main reason for such a disappointing fate is musealisation, specifically a general lack of contextualisation[3]. Indeed, by isolating inscriptions from their context, i.e., the public space of the city with which they had a semantic relationship, we deprive them of their foremost function, thus failing to conceive inscriptions not only as *documents* but also as *monuments*[4].

That is not only an issue of musealisation; it reflects a long-standing bad habit in our field of study, which only in recent years has been confronted by some scholars. In fact, only a few epigraphers have the chance to work on the inscriptions themselves; most of the specialists use inscriptions as written documents and sources, as if they were cut into paper, not durable matter[5]. To put it with the words of Louis Robert: «Toute inscription doit évoquer un site. La tâche des épigraphistes n'est pas de mettre les inscriptions dans des boîtes de conserve, comme d'autres font les sardines, les légumes et les fruits ; elle est de reconstituer l'histoire de l'antiquité, dans son cadre physique, grâce aux inscriptions[6]».

2. The dissemination of epigraphy: a state of the art

For all the reasons I have highlighted so far, we have yet to see a rise in interest for inscriptions in epigraphic museums and galleries. Nevertheless, several attempts have been made in the recent fifteen years to bring epigraphy to the public. It would be useful to inform readers of all the projects that have attempted to make epigraphy accessible to a non-specialist audience[7].

The project *Valete Vos Viatores*, in my opinion, is the most comprehensive

[3] Cf. in particular Baratta 2009, 87-89; Beard 2016, 17-19 (https://www.eagle-network.eu/story/putting-ancient-inscriptions-in-the-limelight/).

[4] The theme has been the subject of a specific discussion during of the Colloquio AIEGL-Borghesi 83 in Emilia Romagna in 1983; the proceedings were edited by Angela Donati (cf. Donati 1984 [ed.]); about the themes discussed in the present contribution cf. Sanders 1984, 85-118; Panciera 1984, 119-134; Susini 1984, 135-136.

[5] Although a certain rise of interest for epigraphic studies in relation with the landscapes can be observed in recent works, see for example the works of the Materiale Textkulturen group of the University of Heidelberg (https://www.materiale-textkulturen.de), the studies of Julia Shear, Chiara Lasagni, Giulia Tozzi among others (e.g. Shear 2017; Lasagni 2017; Lasagni 2019; Tozzi 2021).

[6] Cf. Robert 1953, 11-12.

[7] It must be noted that most of these projects mostly focus on the dissemination of Latin epigraphy.

and structured project in the field; in fact, it consists of several cores: it has involved the collaboration of many cultural institutions, including universities and museums, the work of digital researchers (for the realisation of the 3D models of the inscriptions) and the creation of a videogame, exploiting the latest gamification practices[8]. Financed by the programme *Creative Europe*[9], the project achieved very good results, showing, in particular, how collaboration and harmonisation between different sectors (ICT, museology, traditional epigraphic studies, and the gaming industry) can lead to important breakthroughs in the research.

An interesting project which is not entirely focused on epigraphy, but a one that tries nonetheless to bring epigraphy to the public, is the "Latin Now ERC Project" (2017-2023), hosted by the University of Nottingham; it is an interdisciplinary work, which tries to link epigraphy, sociolinguistics and archaeology in a social history perspective in the North-Western Roman Empire, with a methodology based on evolving technologies (GIS, EpiDoc, RTI). With many panels and workshops, the project has achieved a very good degree of dissemination in many countries, such as France, Germany, Spain, Portugal and UK[10].

From a didactic point of view, some recent noteworthy projects should be mentioned: "Roman Inscriptions of Britain in Schools", an Open Learning collaboration between *LatinNow* and *Classics For All* which provides teachers with some very useful resources for teaching Latin epigraphy[11]; an interesting collaborative exchange between institutions based on Digital Epigraphy for the School-Work Alternation in Italy, to make accessible the inscriptions of the Museo Civico Castello Ursino of Catania[12]; the context "*Scripta Legamus*" organised by the AICC (*Associazione Italiana di Cultura Classica*) which aimed to receive proposition of epigraphic dissemination projects made by high school students[13].

Many other noteworthy projects should be mentioned (which for reasons of economy will be mentioned in a footnote)[14].

[8] See in part. the *homepage* of the "*Valete Vos Viatores*" project (https://www.unav.edu/web/valete-vos-viatores).

[9] https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe.

[10] See the *homepage* of the project at https://latinnow.eu.

[11] For the *homepage* of *Classics For All*, see https://classicsforall.org.uk; for the *RIB in Schools* see https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/schools/about.

[12] See Agodi - Cristofaro *et al.* 2018.

[13] Concluded in 2023, see https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-27-aprile-premiazione-concorso-scripta-legamus-2023-le-superiori-AEAoRdED?refresh_ce=1.

[14] E.g. the Flagship Storytelling Application of EAGLE Europeana (https://www.eagle-network.eu/resources/flagship-storytelling-app/), the documentaries "Meet the Romans" with Professor Mary Beard (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01gknyq), the #*StoriedaMNR* campaign, written and directed by Dr. Carlotta Caruso of Museo Nazionale Romano (see also the book *101 Storie Svelate* by Carlotta Caruso for Dielle Editore, 2021), the two projects of Dr. Valentina Uglietti for

3. The research project: a way of "telling stones"[15]

Despite the fact that these projects have achieved excellent results from a dissemination point of view, the relationship between epigraphic museum institutions and the public is still tenuous. In this respect, the purpose of this contribution is to present my ongoing research at the University of Turin, which is centered around a new perspective on the dissemination of epigraphy.

The project is entitled "Narrating epigraphy in the sites of the ancient city: a digital project for the epigraphic landscape of Athens" and its aim is to offer for the first time a theoretical framework for the dissemination of Greek epigraphy in a digital environment, with a selection of case studies from the Athenian epigraphic landscape[16]. The intended outcome would not be a specific dissemination product, but a *best-practice* bibliographic reference that could be useful for specialists to study the dissemination of epigraphy as a subject *per se*. To understand what the criteria behind this work are, we should start by asking ourselves some key questions.

1. *Why should we tell*? Specifically, what do inscriptions offer, that a non-specialised audience could benefit from? And that is linked to another crucial question: *what to tell*? Obviously, not all inscriptions are equally communicable, and they are difficult to understand to different degrees. The selection of some projects which aim to enhance user experience of epigraphy in museums or to

the Musei Civici di Reggio Emilia, ("*Fermati e leggi, viaggiatore*", cf. https://artsandculture.google.com/story/3AVBa6tlmVXZKA and the project-exhibition On the Road "*Via Emilia, 187 a. C.-2017*", cf. https://www.musei.re.it/spqr-avventure-nellantica-regium-lepidi/), the *Cross-reads/ISicily* work in Sicilian museums (in particular: http://sicily.classics.ox.ac.uk/museums, an open access database of all the museums and related inscriptions).

[15] "*Telling stones*" is the title proposed by Professor Chiara Lasagni for an ongoing experiment of *digital storytelling* of the epigraphic landscape of Athens, conducted by Professor Daniela Marchiandi, Professor Chiara Lasagni and by the author at the University of Turin in collaboration with a group of Post-Graduate Researchers, Ph.D. Candidates, and master's degree students. It will take place in Athens in the coming June and it will consist in an epigraphic tour of Athens, with selected epigraphic-related subjects presented by the participants; those presentations will then become public and free geo-referenced audio-guides on the Open storytelling App #IZITravel (https://izi.travel/it).

[16] This is a Ph.D. Project financed by the NextGeneration EU Plan of the Recovery Fund, PON Action IV, "Research and Innovation" (http://www.ponricerca.gov.it/notizie/2021/dottorati-su-tematiche-dell-innovazione-e-green-nuove-risorse-dal-pon-ricerca-e-innovazione/). It was conceived by Professors Daniela Marchiandi and Chiara Lasagni; the latter has long investigated the semantic relationship between inscriptions and public spaces of the city in the context of the project Epigraphic Landscape of Athens (the ELA database: http://www.epigraphiclandscape.unito.it), for which she is head researcher; cf. Lasagni 2017, 23-52; Lasagni 2019, 149-176.

build audience development strategies tend to fall on funerary inscriptions[17]. That is because these inscriptions are empathically engaging, for obvious reasons. That empathy, specifically in the etymological sense of "feeling emotions within another's body", can be enhanced by imagination; stories of the dead people mentioned in the inscription, moments of everyday life impressionistically portraited by creativity. They are indeed "lives from stones"[18], albeit for the most part fictional ones. However, such an approach could reflect a very good degree of audience engagement while sacrificing a bit of scientific correctness. Fiction storytelling poses a problem, a specifically epigraphic one: inscriptions are historical sources, not always windows on common people's life (and funerary inscriptions seldom offer more detail than the name and the occupation of the defunct, thus forcing the communicator to a very hard work of imagination). That answers to the first question: the public could benefit from inscriptions by understanding their importance also (and especially) as monumental history pages.

However, as I highlighted before, inscriptions in museums suffer the loss of their monumental meaning, because they are out of context; that obviously responds to conservational needs, but it has downsides too. We cannot think of removing inscriptions from museums, both because of conservational problems and for usually insufficient data about their original location; at least, that cannot be done physically. But we can make use of evolving digital techniques (see point 2 here) to re-create a context: not only in the sense of a box that contains epigraphy (that would be no different from the *boît de conserve* that Louis Robert warned us about) but in re-establishing the semantic relation between inscriptions and their landscape. Then we could provide an innovative answer to question: *what to tell*? Public inscriptions (accounts, lists, decrees, laws, treatises etc.), documents that could be not always appealing the public, and yet they paradoxically serve our purpose much better than funerary inscriptions, for reasons that I will try to highlight in the following analysis. Specifically, I will make a case for honorary decrees as a particularly interesting communication subject, as we will see below.

2. *How to tell?* That is, why the need for a digital environment[19]? A sufficient knowledge, at least, of evolving technologies to enhance user experience

[17] Not all of them; see the second paragraph here.

[18] The expression is coined by Polly Low but in reference to the long biographic layout of the *megistai timai* decrees (cf. Low 2016); we will talk about this below.

[19] That is an intended reprise of a critic moved by Gregory Crane, who polemically affirmed that «digital humanists focus too much of their attention on questions of *how* we should exploit new forms of technology in our teaching and research and not enough on questions of *why*» (cf. Crane 2016, 127).

involving inscriptions should be required of all epigraphers. in fact, those tools[20] (e.g. Augmented/Virtual/Mixed Reality, Virtual Tour 360°, QGis and WEBGis, Videomapping) could be very useful not only in dissemination but also for a didactic purpose, thus helping to meet the request of a more engaging way to teach epigraphy at an academic level[21]. Contrary to what some scholars tend to think, digital storytelling is not a passing fad, but the natural evolution of a more classic way of "telling stories" (that is, almost any kind of matter)[22]. The way scholars communicate the value of their research to the public must evolve with society. However, that doesn't mean that "digital" automatically means "correct" or "evolved". In a recent contribution Silvia Orlandi, president of AIEGL and head of the EAGLE Europeana Project, has recalled a golden rule of digital projects defined by Perry Hewitt, the digital chief officer of Harvard University: «don't do digital for the sake of digital»[23]. In my research, digital techniques (*digital storytelling* in particular) are analysed as tools to reduce the distance between Greek epigraphy and the public, by offering a captivating and scientifically correct framework entirely based on the traditional study of inscriptions.

3. That leads us to the second question: *who should tell*? Capable epigraphers should learn to be also capable communicators, because only specialists have the knowledge required to study, select, and bring inscriptions to a wider audience. In fact, a general tendency to relegate specialists to a role behind the curtain can be observed in many Italian historical broadcasts, podcasts, TV shows etc.[24]. That way of conceiving public dissemination reflects an evolution (or perhaps an involution) of the role of the communicator: in my view, he tends to be like a lecturer of the Second Sophistic; he tells stories because he knows *how* to, thus putting away the question on *what* to tell and *why*. Communicators meet the demands of the audience because they are good performers, but they sometimes lack specific knowledge – and even if they don't, occasionally they speak about matters

[20] Some of the most renowned digital storytelling techniques, now widely experienced in most museums, are analysed in a recent work by Elisa Bonacini (see Bonacini 2020, 61-263) with provided case studies.

[21] Cf. Donati 2007, 419-20; Mahony 2016, 33-50; Orlandi 2019, 13-15; Bodard - Stoyanova 2016, 51-68.

[22] About this matter, an important study is Bonacini 2020, entirely focused on the analysis of digital storytelling in museums.

[23] Cf. Orlandi 2016, 206, citing Perry Hewitt's interview released for *Huffington Post* in 2014 (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/harvards-chief-digital-of_b_4701663).

[24] The most renowned case to prove my argument, perhaps, is the TV Show "Ulisse, il piacere della scoperta", conducted by Alberto Angela. It is an engaging, diverse, and interesting show, that nonetheless has a work of specialists that stay in the background, without involving in first-person communication, which is left to Angela instead.

very different from their field of study[25]. That could be considered an incorrect practice from a methodological point of view: not everything can be communicated to the public, considered the time and resources spent on single research by specialists; selected arguments, which have been the subject of extensive research work, are the best choices. On the other hand, specialists tend to have almost no interest in communication, which leads to a partial loss of connection with the public: a well-prepared orchestra in an empty concert room (the "*Echo-chamber*", to use the words of Gabriel Bodard and Matteo Romanello[26]). If epigraphers themselves started to reflect on the need to communicate the value of inscriptions to the public, we would surely observe an increase in interest for epigraphy, both in university and museums. This is true especially for Greek epigraphy, which hasn't been the specific subject of dissemination projects (see paragraph 2 here[27]).

All these criteria are analysed in my project, thus responding to a compelling need in the field: a theoretical framework. There are indeed projects and attempts to bring epigraphy to the public, even if they are few[28]. But these projects, which achieve wonderful results from a dissemination perspective, tend to disregard the need for a theoretical reference; instead, such a reference would make the operation replicable, and it would help scholars achieve a much-needed systematization of the discipline.

4. Why public inscriptions? Honours for Philippides of Kephale and the "path of honours"

Public inscriptions could be very interesting as subject to communicate to a non-specialised audience: they can be explained in relation with their landscape, thus helping the public understand their role as means of communication and giving the specialist the possibility to structure interesting topographical narratives (like thematic paths, for example, as it will be shown with honorary decrees).

[25] The most famous one is surely Professor Alessandro Barbero, a beloved public communicator and medieval historian who is widely asked to speak about ancient, modern, or contemporary history as well.

[26] That is the title of a collection of contributions edited by Gabriel Bodard and Matteo Romanello (cf. Bodard - Romanello [eds.] 2016).

[27] Professor Mary Beard, in a speech given during the EAGLE Conference of 2016, made a "gloomy" point about the possibilities of bringing Greek epigraphy to the public: «(…) I very much doubt that there is much to be done, outside Greek speaking cultures, to bring Greek epigraphic texts to a wide audience, whether on television or elsewhere. The audience's engagement depends on the basic recognisability of the words on the stone or bronze. If the public even begin to pronounce the letters they see in front of them, there is little hope of making them engaging».

[28] See above, n.15.

Their publication place has a very meaningful value, because it establishes a semantic relationship between the inscription and other monuments. In fact, public inscriptions reflect the ideology and the political history of the *polis*. In this respect, they represent an invaluable source, and can be very useful to show the public the importance of written communication within the polis, to convey political, civic as well as ideological messages[29].

Let us take as example an inscription which I consider particularly useful in demonstrating the analysis carried out so far: the honorary decree for the comic poet Philippides of Kephale[30]. From a communication perspective it offers many insights, both on its own and in relationship with the category of texts to which it belongs, the so-called *megistai timai* decrees[31]. The choice as an example of this type of public inscription is motivated by two essential elements. Firstly, the honorary decrees perhaps represent the type of epigraphic document for which the positioning takes on the greatest importance[32]; indeed, these inscriptions convey complex messages, both for material and layout characteristics and for their exemplary value[33], not only to eternalize the merits of the honorand, but also to stimulate the competition between citizens[34]. To achieve this complex message, the stele bearing the decree was erected in a context that already established a semantic relationship with the other monuments and inscriptions that were in the same place and had a similar function[35]. Secondly, from what we know about the complex procedure underlying the bestowal of the *megistai timai*, a long dossier was to be presented to the *boule*, highlighting the political biography of the honorand[36]. At the time of publication, the city would have reflected these biographical motifs in the text of the inscription, which now allows us to have at our disposal documents of extraordinary narrative value. The life of the honorand represents a point of connection between biography and history, since it is intimately linked to its contemporary history. Another fundamental element of this kind of documents is their potential to appear as epigraphic thematic paths. The decree that I will examine represents a first stage of a "path of honours", so to speak, that builds a unique political and ideological narrative, organically

[29] Cf. Bodel 2001, xvii.

[30] *IG* II^3 1 877, *Syll*^{3} 374, Tozzi 2021, 74-82; AIO, https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGII31/877, ELA id:278 (http://www.epigraphiclandscape.unito.it/index.php/browse/ela-278).

[31] For this category of texts see Gauthier 1985; Kralli 1999-2000, 133-62; Oliver 2007a; Low 2016.

[32] See Camp 2020, 98-104.

[33] Cf. Lasagni 2019, 150.

[34] See Liddel 2003, 79-83; Meyer 2013; Lambert 2017.

[35] This is made evident in recent studies concerning the North-Western part of the Athenian Agora, see Shear 2017; Lasagni 2019.

[36] See Low 2018.

involving more places of the *polis*.

Now, let us come to the inscription at hand. I won't dwell on the inscription itself because there are notable epigraphic and historical studies about it[37]. Instead, I will focus on analysing its points of interest from a public communication perspective. Firstly, we can reflect on the importance of its publication space, the *temenos* of Dionysos Eleuthereos adjacent to the theatre, on the southern slopes of the Acropolis[38]. The placement of the stele in Dyonisos' *temenos* is indicated in the publication clause of the decree. In her recent study devoted to the decrees originally set up in this area[39], Giulia Tozzi has underlined that the publication of Philippides' stele in the theatre space is to be linked with his activity as *agonothetes* and cultural and religious reformer, thus putting him in relation with the statues of the tragic poets whose erection was ordered by Lycurgus of Boutadai. Although this consideration is worthwhile, from a communication perspective we also need to reflect on one meaningful aspect of Philippides' work in connection with the rebellion against Demetrius the Besieger in 287/6 BC. The reviving of old traditions, such as the *Panathenaia* and the cult of Demeter and Kore has also a political meaning, since the influence of the Antigonids had 'contaminated' (from an Athenian point of view) those traditions[40]. That is evident from the text (ll. 40-50, transl. by Sean Byrne[41]): «and he was the first to institute an additional competition to Demeter and Kore as a memorial to the [freedom] of the People; (…) and on all these things he spent much money from his own resources and rendered accounts according to the laws, and he has never done anything contrary to democracy either in word or deed». Significantly it was in the theatre of Dionysos that Dromokleides of Sphettos acclaimed the Besieger by proposing a Macedonian garrison on the Museum hill. The space of the theatre acquires a new meaning for the public; it represents, of course, a space connected with the dramatic activity, but it was also the stage for the political internal struggle and debate of the *polis*. There, tyrants, kings, and politicians had their own dramatic competition, a very serious one indeed.

Then we can go a step further, moving from the theatre itself and gazing upon the Aegean Sea, upon Thracia, Syria and Egypt, that is upon the delicate chessboard of the Eastern Mediterranean torn apart by the Diadochi Wars. In fact,

[37] See above, n. 21.

[38] About this see Greco - Longo *et al.* 2014, 165-179; Tozzi 2021.

[39] Cf. Tozzi 2021, 74-82.

[40] About the events concerning the rebellion against Demetrius the Besieger, see Habicht 1997, 142-167; Oliver 2007b, 122-127; Bayliss 2011, 172-176; Osborne 2012, 36-50. Cf. Paus. I 25.2-26.3. and Plut. *Dem.* 34.3-5. For the "de-contamination" of the Demetrian influence on Athenian cultural and religious traditions, see Mikalson 1998.

[41] See ID: AIO_353: https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGII31/877.

the inscription of Philippides can be seen in relation to other inscriptions of the same kind, which tell different chapters of the same story (or the same story seen by different characters). His part of the tale is focused on the deep friendship with one of the powerful successors of Alexander, Lysimachus of Thracia, and in this respect the inscription tells us a dramatic story: when the Antigonids met Seleucus and Lysimachus in the battle of Ipsos (301 BC) many Athenians fought on both sides and fell or were taken as prisoners. Philippides met with Lysimachus, to pledge a case for them, asking the release of the prisoners and the permission to bury the war dead. He managed to do that, and he organised, at his own expense, the return of the ones who wanted to come home and the recruitment in Lysimachus' regiments of those who wanted to keep living as soldiers. He then spoke with Demetrius, on behalf of the Athenians, for the release of the prisoners who fought on the other side of the battle, and he obtained it.

It was a very dramatic moment for the *polis*, and Philippides' powerful friend accepted his requests willingly. Moreover, he gifted the Athenians a consistent donation of grain and money, thus aiding the newly recovered Athenian democracy to re-establish itself, at least internally. This is also evident from the text (ll.16-35, transl. by Sean Byrne[42]): «(…) those citizens who perished in the crisis he buried at his own expense, while he alerted the king to those who became prisoners, and after gaining their release, those wishing to remain in service he arranged that they be assigned to regiments, and those preferring to leave he supplied with clothes and travelling money from his own resources and sent them where each wished, more than three hundred in all; (…) and since the People have recovered their freedom, he has continued to say and to do what is in the interests of the preservation of the city, including requesting the king to help with money and grain, so that the People may remain free (…)». It is this democratic regime that praises Philippides and honours him, granting him the *megistai timai* and acclaiming him as one of the 'heroes' of the *polis*[43].

This inscription has yet another level, which takes us further on in the "path of honours", i.e., the narrative of this democratic revival read within these *megistai timai* decrees; there are other protagonists at play in this story: Kallias of Sphettos, Democharesof Leuconoe, nephew of Demosthenes, himself another character (albeit a dead one), Olympiodoros and many others. Their decrees and statues are involved in a complex semantic interaction which has been the focus of recent prominent studies, in the *côté* of the north-western part of the Athenian Agora[44]. What catches my interest is the chance to link all these decrees and all these characters together to create a unitary story, a tale of a fragile democracy in

[42] See above, 29.

[43] See Culasso Gastaldi 2001, 65-98.

[44] About this see especially Shear 2017; Lasagni 2019.

peril, of would-be 'heroes', of ideology in comparison and how it could be read by citizens in relationship with the spaces of the city in which this narrative took place. A non-specialised audience could be taught the importance of these events and how these inscriptions provide us with invaluable insight, albeit partial and perilous, on how the *polis* lived through and reacted to them.

We shouldn't be afraid, then, to make use of technical and difficult inscriptions such as the long *megistai timai* decrees to tell a story. It does not matter that such inscriptions are filled with technical and boring details, that seem to be comprehensible only for scholars; we do not need to tell the reader who the eponymous archon was, who was secretary to the pritany, who proposed, what the procedure behind a probuleumatic decree was and so on. Such elements allow us to tell such a tale; but a good communicator would not tell all that he knows, but all that he deems useful and attractive for his audience, given that it is correct.

5. The "path of honours", a proposal for a digital development

So how does the digital element take up a role in this scene? These honorary decrees seem to make a perfect case for a Virtual Tour 360° via browser, that can be presented as a consistent tour across various sites of the city guided by inscriptions. The users would have the possibility to take the path, starting from the theatre of Dionysos, interacting with informative contents, images, sketches, squeezes, 3D models and stories that can catch their interest, a format which is very similar to Google Maps; the familiarity with this kind of user interface would make a good case for its usability, and it would have limited costs as well, as we only need to consider the maintenance of the server on which the browser is hosted. The materials offered in the pop-up windows would be selected from databases, Open Access epigraphic corpora, as per the cultural politics of the European Union and the recent growth of Open technologies.

In a wider range of possibilities, that presupposes a deeper involvement of Greek cultural institutions, a network of Bluetooth beacons, QR Codes or other tagging systems could be developed to make this tour accessible *in loco* as well. It would be engaging to follow such a path together with a real visit, and the same could be true for other thematic epigraphic tours. This way, many stories could be unfolded to create a sort of epigraphic tour of Athens. This is, of course, only the most sustainable proposal, i.e., in balance between costs and results and in a perspective of reusability. There are indeed many tools to make these stories accessible to users, and the choice depends not only on creativity but also on the budget. In any case, the more sustainable the proposal, the easier it would be for

other projects to repeat the operation. A key objective of my research project is to develop a methodology that could be viable not only for the Athenian case, but also for other epigraphic contexts.

6. Conclusions

I hope that the growing field of Open studies and the reflection on public epigraphy will lead to define standards for this field; for now, public communication of inscriptions remains a difficult road, and a relatively unexplored one, but a road that must be taken nonetheless, since ancient public inscriptions, and the stories they tell as monumental historical sources, are of utmost importance not only for the comprehension of specific segments of ancient history but also for the political and ideological values they teach, that is the conscious use of public writing, the awareness of the spaces of the city, the very way of a civic community to express itself, values from which any kind of community, such as ours, would surely benefit.

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Narrating epigraphy in the sites of the ancient city

Abstract

Il presente contributo ha lo scopo di presentare il progetto di dottorato in corso presso l'Università di Torino, che ha come obiettivo quello di offrire uno studio di *best practices* per la divulgazione dell'epigrafia greca in contesto, assumendo come casi di studio selezionati gruppi di iscrizioni pubbliche ateniesi. Nella prima parte, viene data nota dello stato dell'arte nella divulgazione dell'epigrafia, ponendo alcune considerazioni problematiche alla base di tale riflessione. Nella seconda parte viene presentata una proposta esemplificativa di metodologia di divulgazione applicata a uno dei casi di studio adottati nel progetto, vale a dire il decreto in onore del poeta comico Filippide di Cefale (*IG* II^3 1 877).

The aim of this paper is to present the doctoral project underway at the University of Turin, which aims to offer a study of best practices for the dissemination of Greek epigraphy in context, using selected groups of Athenian public inscriptions as case studies. In the first part, the state of the art in the dissemination of epigraphy is noted, with some problematic considerations underlying this reflection. The second part presents an illustrative proposal for a dissemination methodology applied to one of the case studies adopted in the project, namely the decree in honour of the comic poet Philippides of Kephale (*IG* II^3 1 877).