

My project aims to explore the location of stone inscriptions within the space of selected Greek sanctuaries in Central Greece (Thermon), the Peloponnese (Olympia and Epidauros) and the Aegean islands (Kos). Its goal is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between monuments and texts written upon them, and their architectural and spatial contexts. In doing so, I will be aiming to validate the hypothesis that the spread of the practice of carving texts in stone (the so-called 'epigraphic habit') induced changes and transformations of the local topography, and that, conversely, the topography impacted an epigraphic habit by influencing the use of specific strategies in the process of displaying inscriptions within a public space. The notion that the project intends to investigate is that these mutual interactions can be traced in many territories of the Eastern Mediterranean. When successful, a new framework for historical enquiry will emerge, that will enable, and even urge for, the reconsideration of many aspects of ancient epigraphy and the urbanization process of ancient cities. This project will not only reveal how people shaped their architectural environment through epigraphic tradition, but it will open up new research perspectives on how people negotiated relationships, expressed emotions and how they communicated with each other within urban space, as inscriptions were a communication tool used between people of equal status and between different social groups (upper class with lower class; citizens with foreigners; men with women; kings with their subjects and so forth).

The objective of my proposed research will be attained through an interrelated two-stage approach:

RQ1 - How did the spread of the epigraphic culture shape and (re)arrange space?

Therefore, I will investigate which categories of inscriptions (decrees, honorific inscriptions or dedications), for which group of recipients (gods, kings, local citizens) and in which time periods influenced local topography the most? how did inscriptions divide and organize space? Moreover, the material of inscriptions (bronze, marble, limestone), colours and decorations will be studied in order to reveal the way in which inscriptions might have had an impact on the perception of space.

RQ2 - How did the landscape and (re)arrangements of urban space affect the epigraphic habit?

In order to investigate the potential influence of the landform and sanctuary's layout on epigraphic culture, this project focus on sites situated in hilly areas (Thermon), those located on plains (Olympia), by the coast (Epidauros) and on small islands (Kos).

What leaves this field wide open for investigation is the lack of comprehensive studies which would collect and examine the mass epigraphic dossier from the Eastern Mediterranean, focusing on its material aspect instead of on the text, language and patterns of preserved documents. By bridging together epigraphic and archaeological methods with urban planning perspective, the proposed project is multidisciplinary in its approach. In its nature it is also cross-regional and multi-period. The project offers a diachronic approach, as the Archaic period is chosen as the departure point of the research, while the chronological end point will be late 6th/early 7th c. CE. Nevertheless, the chronological framework will differ in particular cities as both starting and ending points vary depending on the region. Both the risk and the potential gains of this project lie in its ambitious scope, chronologically and geographically, and in its crossing of disciplinary boundaries.