

Introduction to the first *epigraphy.info* workshop
in Heidelberg, 21st – 23rd March 2018

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Dear participants,

let me draft my introduction to this workshop in the shape of a decalogue, intended as ten key words and thoughts:

First of all, good day and a great welcome in the name of the whole team of *EDH* to our three days workshop *epigraphy.info*! Thank you to all of you for not having spared any expense in coming to Heidelberg and participating in this workshop situated so scenically below Heidelberg Castle!

Secondly, we all are aware of the fact that in the next three days we will take decisions which will be extremely important for the future of digital epigraphy in terms of its methods and practice with regard to the research of ancient inscriptions. The idea of an open collaborative platform for epigraphy has been floating around for some time, it has been discussed again and again on various occasions, and by doing so it has become increasingly apparent that there is no valid alternative if we effectively want to overcome, in a sustainable way, any waste of resources and any limitations in providing scientific knowledge by persisting with the insular concepts, which have up to now been common practice. This workshop will provide the space for the indispensable fundamental discussion about how to solve this crucial issue.

Therefore we are, **thirdly**, extremely grateful to the *Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, first of all for being ready to accompany this important exchange of ideas, but also for providing this wonderful venue and the necessary infrastructure – and, last but not least, for supporting the nerves and energy of all of us with the necessary supply of calories and caffeine.

It is, **fourthly**, well known, that the initiative for this workshop *epigraphy.info* as a specific approach to give a concrete shape to the already existing considerations and reflections, has started from *EDH*. Actually, *tempus urget!*, time is pressing!, in so far as the lifetime of *EDH* ends in exactly 33 months and 10 days. This point, obviously, won't merely affect *EDH*, but also all collaborating epigraphic research projects, within *EAGLE* and beyond, not to speak about the numerous users worldwide of all of these single and frequently complementary organized data of basic research.

Within this time much has still to be dealt with: The core business is *in primis* the systematic processing of the round about 12.000 inscriptions and their related metadata of the Gallic-Germanic

provinces. Then the care for the storage of the data post 2020 and their sustainable usage on at least a minimum level; the latter, fortunately, will be ensured by the *Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities* who will provide a data repository and the maintaining of the website, which is calming to know, of course.

However, this alone is not enough, if one takes in to account the, summed up for the passed 32 years, millions of Deutsche Mark and Euros of (public) funds, the successively grown intensive use of the data of *EDH* worldwide, and, based on that, the significant number of linkages and interactions within the relevant digital epigraphic projects. What we all aim at, therefore, is to establish an advanced level of sustainability, able to uphold not only the reuse of *EDH*'s, and hereby also of the *EAGLE*'s, data as such, but in particular a level of sustainability able to maintain and increase the vitality of digital epigraphy as a whole by enhancing it in an up-to-date and forward-looking way.

But: How can such a task be realized and managed? This is the big question we have to try to give an answer, for the perspective of an open collaborative platform is, in our view, not a luxury but a necessity, and, at the same time, a commitment. Accordingly, the opinion that the building of a collaborative platform must be, not any more, a matter of an *'if'* but, on the contrary, of the *'how'*, seems now to be an essential part of the unanimous credo among the experts of the digital humanities.

Hence and **fifthly**, while *EDH*, of course, is the initiator and the motor for the present workshop, the role of being protagonist belongs to all of the here present participants and to those who declared their will to be actively involved though not personally present at this workshop. That is a really auspicious starting position, and we can look forward with expectation to the results we will have worked out until the end of this workshop, and at which destination the next workshop will bring us all together again.

This is, **sixthly**, a work-shop with emphasis on work in the sense of a lively exchange of ideas, critical but constructive discussions, and the clear intention of creating a sound concept – even if in several respects necessarily only preliminary until the next steps. The plan of the forthcoming three days takes this into account in so far as

today we'll deal with a wide range of *Impulses & Discussions* concerning issues like *financing and sustaining a digital platform, the concrete working with an editor and navigator like epigraphy.info, the management of editorial platforms, the relationship to already existing databases, the relation between databases and corpora editions* up to the question of *versioning and mini publications*.

Tomorrow, by contrast, will give space to the *working groups* dedicated to explore

themes and issues, which seem to be essential to all of us, and which will be defined by us all during this afternoon.

The third day, finally, will be the ‘day of reckoning’, i.e. our chance for *a future-oriented definition of results and concepts* and for the *formulation of the next steps*.

Seventh: The focus set here on certain topics, is the result of numerous debates within the Heidelberg team as well as with colleagues from other epigraphic projects, so that they correspond, at least to a large extent, to the major desiderata of the epigraphic community as a whole, and this was also confirmed by the considerable feedback of the here present participants. Moreover, we do benefit from the circumstance, that *epigraphy.info* does not have to invent the wheel anew, for it may learn and take its inspiration from its elder brother *papyri.info*. A significant part in respect of technical opportunities and content-based concepts is already prefigured there, some of it may be transferred, other aspects will have to be modified and adapted to the reality of the epigraphic research practice, of course, when building up the functional younger brother *epigraphy.info*.

But, **eighth**, whatever the final product will look like: envisaged is, at any rate, the establishment of an open collaborative platform of ancient epigraphy – to begin probably, for pragmatic reasons, with the Latin and Greek epigraphy, but this of course has to be discussed –, (an open collaborative platform of ancient epigraphy) which merges on one side the standards of fundamental research and on the other the potentials of standardized and sustainable information technology for the processing of scientific data, assembling at the same time, in terms of its structure, both the synergetic use and the keeping available of already generated data as well as those still to be generated. That is what we are aiming at in terms of an advanced level post 2020.

Ninth, discussing all that will be one of the main topics of the working groups of tomorrow. Therefore, let’s explain the procedure: The neuralgic points and questions arising from the just drafted claim which may need a clarification, are listed within the options on the **programme** (coloured in pink) in your hands. Perhaps they may and should be complemented by further topics, or be completely changed. Therefore we invite you to nominate your favored themes within the next hours via the *googledoc* on the [epigraphy.info website](http://epigraphy.info), which will, in general, serve as our common working space during this workshop. Out of this googledoc will be defined, this evening before dinner, the thematic focus of the working groups of tomorrow.

Finally and **tenth**: To summarise, let me close with an *adhortatio* addressed to all of us:

let’s maintain discipline considering the scarce time (i.e. let’s strictly respect the programme, especially today’s tour de force),

let's make suggestions proactively, when appropriate, for further issues regarded as central (especially for the working groups of tomorrow),

let's practise solution-oriented working – it is important to be aware that the results generated here are essential, as they will be decisive for what may follow, or not,

let's reflect, at this stage, what the concept of *epigraphy.info* may look like and whatever might be the tasks for the next workshop.

With this in mind: **down to work!** It is all about the future of digital epigraphy and its contribution to the digital humanities.