

CLAG 350 | The Greek Stones Speak: An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy
Fall 2026

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Course Description

Inscriptions illuminate almost every aspect of the ancient world, from the monumental public laws, decrees and royal pronouncements that announced state policies, to the everyday messages and rude graffiti scratched on potsherds and marble buildings. This course takes a practical approach to the subject, in which students will learn the techniques of reading and transcribing inscriptions and how to make a professional edition of a text, as a way of gaining the skill set needed to find and interpret inscriptions and utilize the relevant bibliography. We will look at the origins of written Greek and its development, examine a variety of types of inscribed material (rock-cut, standing stones, everyday objects) and read through many categories of texts (including public decrees, private dedications, funerary inscriptions, and curses).

Classes will cover a variety of themes from the ancient world through a seminar-style reading of a set of inscriptions which students will prepare in advance. Much of the course will be spent on sites and in museums looking at and working with inscriptions and inscribed monuments, especially at the Epigraphic Museum - the world's largest collection of Greek inscriptions. In learning to handle the epigraphic record, students will be exposed to a much wider vision of Greece than the Classical texts alone can give us; this is particularly true of the less elite groups in ancient society, those lower down the socio-economic ladder as well as non-Greek peoples in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Learning Goals

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Read a range of ancient Greek scripts and dialects
- Analyze non-literary language
- Interpret inscribed monuments in their archaeological contexts
- Evaluate the interactions of Greek with other language groups
- Apply epigraphy to a wide range of ancient subjects

Course Requirements and Assessment

As this is a dedicated higher classics/archaeology/ancient history class, students are expected to have a background in ancient languages, although students with only a semester or two of Greek are encouraged to apply as inscriptions are a great way to gain confidence in the language. As the classes all have a seminar element, students should expect to read and prepare inscriptions for the classes for a minimum of 4 hours per week.

• **Class Contribution 15%** – Class Contribution includes physical and mental presence in the classroom, arriving on time, preparation, and participation in class discussions. Reading assignments and inscription translations are to be completed before each class session. Class contribution is one of the most important factors for determining your grade for the semester. I expect all of you to come prepared, engage in our discussions, ask questions, and voice your opinions in class. If you are extremely uncomfortable speaking in front of a large group of students, you may send your opinions or afterthoughts in writing via email. If you never participate in class and do not send any thoughts by email, your contribution grade will be low.

• **AIO Project 60%** – Throughout the semester, students will work on a project to create entries on given Athenian inscriptions for the project *Attic Inscriptions Online* (<https://www.atticinscriptions.com/>). This is a chance to write a professional academic online publication with translation and commentary of an inscription(s) that can be visited in Athens (we will focus on stones from the Kerameikos excavations). Working with the instructor and the editors of AIO, you will be part of a project to open up the visible epigraphy of the city, georeferencing the monument and offering notes on its interpretation. You will present the preliminary results of your study during midterm week and then spend the rest of the semester writing up your online entries and responding to the editors' comments to see the work through to publication.

• **Midterm presentation 25%** – Students will individually present the work they have done so far on their semester AIO project (see above).

CYA Policies and Regulations

Policy on Assignments, absences and Make-up Work:

Details about assignments and exams will be given in advance. I will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let me know beforehand. Only one unexcused absence will be allowed in accordance with the CYA policy. Further unexcused absences will lower your final grade.

Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

Academic Accommodations:

Students are required to submit an official letter from the office at their school that handles academic accommodations (generally the Office of Disability Services), or to have that office send a letter. Students who have submitted such a letter to CYA should also talk to their professors individually to discuss how these accommodations will work in each specific course.

Site Visits and Accessibility:

This course contains specific physical and spatial elements that are crucial to student learning and which cannot be modified. Students should be aware of these before enrolling in the course.

- This course includes ca. 12 site and museum visits, requiring walking around uneven and hilly terrain.
- This course meets in ca. 12 spaces where there is significant background noise while the professor speaks.
- This course requires students to give a verbal individual presentation in front of the class as part of their assessment.

ePolicy on Original Work:

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

Permitted Uses: You may use AI for brainstorming, clarifying concepts and passages, editing your original prose, debating ideas, formatting (not generating from scratch) citations and bibliography sections, or reviewing a completed draft. You may also request a generic outline to organize initial thoughts, provided you substantially modify and expand it into your own work. In all cases, you are required to review, verify and take full responsibility for the final output.

Prohibited Uses: It is academic dishonesty to use AI to generate drafts, paragraphs, or answers to assignments, to complete in-class or reflective work, or to submit AI-generated content without your significant intellectual transformation and synthesis.

To ensure the integrity of submitted work, I reserve the right to ask students to orally explain or defend the content and reasoning behind any submission. Such a request comprises a standard check, not an accusation. If a student is unable to do so, I may require the work to be revised and resubmitted. A persistent inability to adequately explain the work may be treated as a violation of academic integrity.

It is imperative to understand that AI can produce incorrect or biased information. Your critical judgment is essential. You are responsible for fact-checking all content and ensuring your final work reflects your own understanding. Specific applications and citation practices will be further discussed in class. When in doubt, ask for clarification!

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops is not permitted or possible during the majority of site visits.

Upgrade to 400-level course

Courses can be upgraded to a 400-level. This constitutes usually 25% additional work on the part of the student. The option to upgrade opens the second week of classes. If you are interested in this option, please talk to your professor.

Schedule, meeting points, readings and class assignments

Class	Topic / Readings / Place (if on site/museum)
1	Course introduction: the syllabus and assignments
2	The origins of Greek writing and the earliest inscriptions. The earliest appearances of Greek writing on stone and pottery; Archaic scripts and dialects; the relationship in early writing between text and object. Class reading: Woodhead (1981) chapter II 'The Origin and Development of the Greek Alphabet'.
3	How to read the stones I Students will be guided through the processes of reading and recording inscriptions. Class reading: Woodhead (1981) chapter I 'Signs and Symbols'; McLean (2002) 1.1 'Editorial Sigla'.
4	How to read the stones II We will practice drawing inscriptions from squeezes (paper casts) and look at how editions of texts are published. Class reading: TBC
5	Attic Inscriptions Online project: Introduction and Names in Greek Epigraphy. Names can tell us a great deal about the backgrounds of those that bear them; we will look at why certain names were chosen for different types of people or in different areas, what they can say about social or economic standing, and how they can help us trace families through the epigraphic and literary record. Students' AIO project will mostly deal with funerary inscriptions, and so names are crucial. Class reading: McLean (2002) 1.4 'The Onomastics and Prosopography of Greek Names'.
6	Early Attic inscriptions I – the alphabet and dialect. This class looks at the earliest inscriptions from Athens, written in the Attic dialect and script, and traces the development of both up to the early Classical period. Class reading: M. K. Langdon, 'A New Greek Abecedarium,' <i>Kadmos</i> 44 (2005) 175-182.
7	Trip to the Agora storerooms: ostracism. We will take a look at a collection of ostraca from the Agora excavations and discuss further the process of ostracism and the wealth of data it provides on not only fifth-century BC politics but also the language, spelling and dialect of ordinary Athenians. Class reading: J. P. Sickinger, New Ostraka from the Athenian Agora, <i>Hesperia</i> 86 (2017) 443-508. Meet: Athenian Agora main entrance, Adrianou St.
8	Early Attic inscriptions II – the shepherd graffiti on Mount Hymettus. Several thousand graffiti of Archaic shepherds and goatherds have been discovered carved into the marble outcrops of Mount Hymettos and its foothills. They offer a unique insight into social history, linguistics, and religion before the coming of democracy. Set texts: a selection of drawings of graffiti found by M. K. Langdon (Moodle - try to make texts from the drawings).
9	Language of the street: graffiti and scribbled invective. Private inscriptions constitute a large and understudied body of ancient texts: economic texts (stamps and marks on pottery), graffiti and games on buildings, Athenian ostracism. Class reading: C. Taylor, 'Graffiti and the Epigraphic Habit', in J. Baird and C. Taylor (eds) <i>Ancient Graffiti in Context</i> , Routledge (2011), pp. 90-109. Set texts: ML 21 Ostracism at Athens.
10	Trip to the Acropolis Museum - Dedications to the gods in Archaic Athens. The Acropolis has produced a huge collection of inscribed statue bases from the pre-Persian period, giving us information about the processes of dedicating to the gods and about the people who were setting up these expensive gifts. Class reading: C. M. Keesling, <i>The Votive Statues of the Athenian Acropolis</i> , Cambridge (2003) 3-35. Meet: Acropolis Museum, Dionysiou Areopagitou St.
11	Midterm presentations I
12	Midterm presentations II
13	Inscriptions and Imperial control in the Athenian Empire II. The Athenian epigraphic habit explodes under the Empire, giving us inscribed records of revolts and their suppression,

	<p>decrees imposing cleruchies and new constitutions on allied states, records of tribute payment to the Athenians, as well as imperial pronouncements. Class reading: TBA</p>
14	<p>Trip to the National Archaeological Museum - The epigraphy of Death. Funerary inscriptions account for the largest proportion of texts on stone to survive. We will use the NAM's extensive collection of gravestones to see what sort of inscriptions are placed on tomb monuments. Class reading: McLean (2002) 2.11 'Funerary Inscriptions'; E. A. Meyer, 'Epitaphs and Citizenship in Classical Athens,' <i>JHS</i> 113 (1993) 99-121. Meet: NAM.</p>
15	<p>Funerary inscriptions in their physical and societal contexts We will look at where Athenians placed their graves, how they commemorated their dead, and what this can tell us about society. Class reading: TBC.</p>
16	<p>Religion, magic, and talking to the gods. Curse tablets and magic spells, often written on lead, were thrown down wells or buried with the dead in order to communicate the writer's wishes to the underworld. Another form of contacting the gods was through an oracle, and many such questions have survived, especially at the sanctuary of Dodona. Class reading: E. Eidinow, <i>Oracles, Curses, & Risk among the Ancient Greeks</i>, Oxford 2007, chapter 7: 'Curses!', pp. 143-159.</p>
17	<p>Trip to the Theatre of Dionysus - winners and losers in the public arena. Drama played an important role in Athenian social, political, and religious life. Inscriptions were set up to commemorate victorious playwrights, actors, choruses, and sponsors. Class reading: A. Chaniotis, 'Theatre Rituals', in P. Wilson (ed.) <i>The Greek Theatre and Festivals</i>, Oxford (2007) 48-66. Meet: Theatre of Dionysus, entrance opposite the Acropolis Museum, Dionysiou Areopagitou.</p>
18	<p>Trip: Epigraphic Museum: Democracy on stone. The Athenian democracy created a great many inscribed monuments carrying the decisions of the People: decrees of the Council and the Assembly, laws, accounts of state bodies. We will examine the anatomy of decrees and discuss the role of inscriptions in accountability. Class reading: McLean (2002) 2.8 'Decrees'; J. K. Davies, <i>Accounts and Accountability in Classical Athens</i>, in R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (edd.) <i>Ritual, Finance, Politics</i>, Oxford 1994, 201-212.</p>
19	<p>Trip: Agora – Cities of Statues: dedications and public benefactors. The public spaces of Greek cities and sanctuaries became filled with statues of benefactors, particularly in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Their inscribed bases and honorific decrees can tell us a great deal about negotiations of power and prestige among city elites. Class reading: McLean (2002) 2.9 'Honorific Decrees, Proxeny Decrees, and Honorific Inscriptions'; J. Ma, <i>Statues and Cities</i>, Oxford 2013, chapter 1 'Towards a Grammar of Honours', 15-43. Meet: Athenian Agora main entrance, Adrianou St.</p>
20	<p>Linguistic interactions: bi- and tri-lingual inscriptions This class will look at the interplay between Greek and other languages in the epigraphic record, whether bilingual funerary inscriptions, or public messages to different audiences. Class reading: TBC.</p>
21	<p>Historical Inscriptions: inscribing the past of the polis In the late Classical and especially the Hellenistic period, Greek poleis inscribed in public places aspects of their own history, listing events and great figures, sometimes going back into mythology. We will look at this phenomenon and ask what brought it about. Class reading: TBC.</p>
22	<p>Trip: An epigraphic walking tour of the city of Athens. A walk around the city hunting for inscriptions in unlikely places and exploring spolia – the reuse of ancient stone blocks in later buildings, particularly churches. Class reading: TBC. Meet: Outside CYA.</p>
23	<p>Inscriptions in Literature from Herodotus to Cavafy. We will trace the use of inscriptions as historical documents and evidence in ancient literature and up to the modern world with how they are viewed in non-academic areas such as poetry.</p>
24	<p>Final Seminar.</p>

Course Bibliography (Required and Supplementary Readings)

Introductions to Epigraphy:

B. H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.-A.D. 337)*. Ann Arbor 2002. An exhaustive introduction to many aspects of the subject.

A. G. Woodhead, *The Study of Greek Inscriptions*. 2nd ed. Cambridge 1981 (although other editions available from various publishers). The course textbook.

F. Miller, 'Epigraphy', in M. H. Crawford (ed.) *Sources for Ancient History*, Cambridge 1983, 80-136.

J. Bodet (ed.) *Epigraphic Evidence. Ancient History from Inscriptions*. London/New York 2012.

Collections of texts and translations:

ML: R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, eds. *A Selection of Greek historical inscriptions to the end of the fifth century B.C.* Rev. ed., Oxford 1988. A crucial collection of texts of the Archaic period and Fifth Century (no translations) with expert commentaries.

OR: R. Osborne & P. J. Rhodes, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 478-404 BC*. Oxford 2017. An updated Meiggs & Lewis, with translations this time, and lengthy commentary.

RO: P. J. Rhodes & R. Osborne, *Greek Historical Inscriptions 404-323 BC*. Oxford 2003. A continuation of Osborne & Rhodes into the Fourth Century.

P. Harding, *From the end of the Peloponnesian War to the battle of Ipsus (Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, vol 2)*, Cambridge 1985.

C. W. Fornara, *Archaic times to the end of the Peloponnesian War (Translated Documents of Greece and Rome, vol 1)*, 2nd ed. Cambridge 1983.

Epigraphic journals and bibliographies:

- F. Bérard et al. *Guide de l'épigraphiste: Bibliographie choisie des épigraphies antiques et médiévales*. 4th ed. Paris 2010. An essential guide to the principal epigraphic corpora and bibliography, updated annually online: <http://www.antiquite.ens.fr/ressources/publications-aux-p-e-n-s/guide-de-l-epigraphiste/article/overview>

- *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (SEG)*. Indispensable annual review of all publications associated with Greek epigraphy, which is always around 5 years behind the current date. Brill has an online version, which the ASCSA subscribes to.

- *Bulletin épigraphique* in the periodical *Revue des Études Grecques* is an annual review of select publications of Greek inscriptions the year after they come out; not as exhaustive as *SEG* but high quality and often lengthy reviews. It was for decades written by Jeanne and Louis Robert (those publications available also in separate bound volumes at the BSA and ASCSA), and every so often they produce volumes of indices.

- Some recent issues of the journal *Archaeological Reports* carry regional epigraphic updates: 'Recent discoveries & resources in Athenian epigraphy,' *AR* 61 (2014-2015) 49-55; 'Recent epigraphic research in Central Greece: Euboea, Phokis & Lokris', *AR* 61 (2014-2015) 65-74; Recent epigraphic research in Thasos, Aegean Thrace & Samothrace (2005-2015), *AR* 61 (2014-2015) 75-93.

Electronic resources:

- The Packard Humanities Institute Searchable Greek Inscriptions website (PHI): this project aims to make available the texts (no lemma or commentary) of all Greek inscriptions, searchable by bibliographic reference or through the Greek text: <http://noapplet.epigraphy.packhum.org/allregions>

- Lexicon of Greek Personal Names Online: the LGPN website allows for searches of all Greek names in their database, as well as searches of almost all their published volumes. The Athens volume is the only one, however, that is updated from the original publication, by one of the editors, Sean Byrne, and has much greater search facilities: <http://www.seangb.org/>

- Attic Inscriptions Online (<https://www.atticinscriptions.com/>) is a project of Steven Lambert, aiming to provide good translations of Athenian inscriptions, papers on Attic inscriptions and other resources.

- The Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents in Oxford has much of its squeeze collection scanned and available online, and provides a long list of other web resources for epigraphy: <http://www.csad.ox.ac.uk/>.

- Writing epigraphic Greek now requires a Unicode font, and one of the most popular is Donald Mastronarde's New Athena Unicode, used with the keyboard input of Greek Keys: <https://apagreekkeys.org/NAUdownload.html>.