



Open Call for Papers

Craft, Creation, or Compliance?

Negotiating the Epigraphic Production of the Ancient Mediterranean

An ERC-funded conference
on artisans as agents of cultural transfer in antiquity
Warsaw
19–21 May 2027

The [STONE-MASTERS project](#) funded from an ERC Starting grant (grant agreement number 101040152) seeks to understand the impact of workshops of stonecutters and mosaicists on the changes in epigraphic cultures during the transition period from the Roman Imperial era to Late Antiquity. The study has the potential of showcasing the artisans as the mainspring behind the vertical cultural transfer of commemorative habits within the elites and broader circles of society. In particular, it seeks to explain to which extent the artisans carving inscriptions and laying-out mosaics on the one hand advised the elite on the contents of their commissioned works; and, on the other, adapted the elitist art to the needs and economical capabilities of the broader social strata, making the new trends more accessible and thus shaping the entire cultural package of the ancient Mediterranean.

Following a conference on the methods of the identification of ancient workshops, organised by our Team in 2023, this conference marks the end of the five-year research period as funded by the ERC. This time, we aim to bring together researchers who wish to engage in a discussion on the re-assessment of the long-established model of private and public commissioning practice and problematise the links between commissioners (commissioning agents) and craftspersons in the production of inscribed monuments. The conference seeks to provide a deeper insight into the act of commissioning and the acts of recording and commemorating the process by inviting reflections on the roles of various individuals,

including donors, commissioners, middlepersons, overseers and artisans. We emphasise a difference between “authorship” and “commission”, which should not be mixed as allegedly synonymous concepts. Our working definition assumes “authorship” as the creation of the contents and formal/material aspects of the work while “commission” as the driving force initiating and funding the process, sometimes mediated by a curator. On the other hand, it will focus on the perspectives of artisans as designers and negotiators of assigned work, whose expertise and professional judgement may have been more significant than the general outline provided by clients in the Roman Imperial period and Late Antiquity. During the event, we will test the hypothesis that contractors and workers could play a more prominent role in the production of material and epigraphic culture than the formally educated or wealthy elite. To give depth to these main research themes, we are inviting submissions of 20-minute papers answering the following questions:

1. How should we understand the process of commissioning inscriptions and negotiation of messages and iconography?
2. What is known about the discourse and negotiations between commissioners, overseers and artisans regarding the final form of commissioned works?
3. How do we understand the concept of “authorship” within this process?
4. How do we define “donors”, “commissioners”, “middlepersons”, “curators”, “overseers”, “artisans”, and their role?
5. To what extent can workshop practices be reconstructed from the material record, and how do they inform our understanding of decision-making processes?
6. Is it possible to identify different steps of production and several workshops involved in the creation of inscriptions?
7. Can we identify the intended and unintended influence by the artisans on the final form of commissioned works? What role do the skill, craft proficiency, personal ambition (or lack thereof) of artisans, and local styles play in the final shape of the commissioned work?
8. What role did the mobility of artisans and workshops play in the transfer of commemorative practices, artistic conventions, and technical knowledge across the Mediterranean?
9. Who was responsible for composing commemorative poems or prose labels (educated commissioners, poets for hire, enslaved or freed persons, or others)?
10. What role did the circulation of manuscript collections of commemorative verses (*syllogae*) and art descriptions (*ekphraseis*) by travellers play in disseminating new cultural trends?
11. How can analytical lenses such as digital tools, experimental archaeology or direct autopsies contribute to the study of the previous questions?



Papers tackling other problems related to the epigraphical production not envisaged in the above list are also welcome!

The speakers will receive full funding for travel (up to 400 EUR) and accommodation costs. The speakers will also be asked to contribute to an **edited volume** which will serve as **the state-of-the-art reference work** for this topic. Due to the completion of the ERC funding, we will ask to submit the final version of papers within three months after the conference to ensure a swift publication of the volume.

Titles and abstracts of up to 300 words for 20-minute talks should be submitted via a [digital submission form](#).

Deadline for abstracts: 1 December 2026, 23:59 CET.

We will ask for a short outline and Powerpoint in English to be distributed among the attendees if the talk is given in a different language.

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Project website: <https://stonemasters.uw.edu.pl/>

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