

**“Talking Stones”: from Stone to History
A Latin Epigraphy workshop for Primary School**

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The educational project “Epigrafia Latina” has been developed within the PON-National Operative Programme “Ricostruire le Storie” (“Reconstructing Histories”, European Union structural funds, 2007-2013). It was presented to the students between 8 and 10 years of age in the “Istituto Comprensivo Balilla-M.R. Imbriani” (Bari). The aim of the Programme was to make the methodology of historical research and the ways of understanding the past through direct analysis of archaeological, epigraphic, artistic and monumental sources, available to a young audience. The project was structured with more traditional lessons and a two-phase workshop: the activities have been conceived in compliance within a rigorous methodological framework, but also in an entirely new recreational and experimental environment, according to the competences and abilities developed during Primary School. The students had the opportunity to examine sources of ancient material culture, to assess their significance to the understanding of the past, and even to try to reproduce them.

The “Epigraphy” module was structured through frontal but interactive lessons, according to the educational theory of the “problem solving” and “cooperative learning”; each stage was alternated with workshop activities, based on the “know how” concept and organized into simulations of epigraphic recording (“The Job of the Epigraphist: young epigraphists in the making” module) and creation of models of inscriptions (“The officina lapidaria at school: we are all stonecutters!” module). Firstly, the lessons provided the theoretical framework of Epigraphy, the methodology, the tools for the study of inscriptions, the activities of a stonemason’s workshop in the Roman Age and the various techniques of realization of epigraphs (preparation of the material support and layout of the text). Afterwards, the theory was “put into practice” in the workshop activities: the students reproduced the conditions of the archaeological discovery of epigraphs (**Fig. 1**) and the following analysis and recording stages (**Fig. 2**). In view of the young age of the students, the inspection of the epigraphic texts was particularly focused on basic expressions (Roman personal names, social status, jobs) and on important paleographic aspects, such as *ordinatio*, rubricated letters, short letters and *litterae longae*, ligatures and other characteristics, which especially caught their imagination. Then, they transformed themselves into “stonecutters”, creating different types of inscriptions on plasticine support and incising a Latin text from a model, provided also with a translation and transcription, in order to aid the understanding (**Fig. 3**). The activity was enriched with educational visits to sites of historical and archaeological interest in the city of Bari: for example, a visit to the *Succorpo* of the Cathedral, where the students had the opportunity to assess the local epigraphic material as a source of information about the city’s history in the Roman Age (**Fig. 4**).

The lessons were followed with intense participation and raised high enthusiasm for the discipline of Epigraphy. Through programmed in-depth analysis, or upon specific request of the students, a first easy approach to Latin language and culture was also made possible.

The experience was concluded with a final “museum exhibition” of all the material so produced, with the collaboration of teachers and families (**Fig. 5**).

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Keywords

Latin epigraphy; primary school; educational projects; stonemasons; epigraphists.



Fig. 1. “The Discovery”:
the students reproduced the conditions of the archaeological discovery of epigraphs.



Fig. 2. “The Job of the Epigraphist: young epigraphists in the making”: the students inspected the “newly discovered” epigraphs.



Fig. 2. “The *officina lapidaria* at school: we are all stonecutters!”: the students created different types of inscriptions on plasticine support and incised a Latin text from a model, provided also with a translation and transcription, in order to aid the understanding.



Fig. 4. Visit to the *Succorpo* of the Cathedral (Bari): the students had the opportunity to assess the local epigraphic material as a source of information about the city's history in the Roman Age.

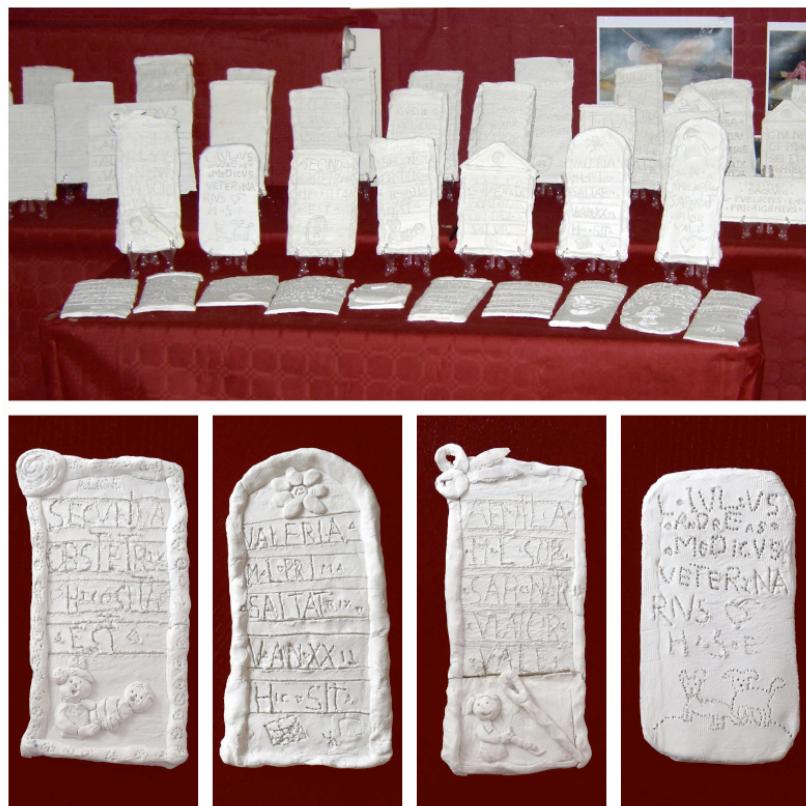


Fig. 5. “The Epigraphic Gallery”: the experience was concluded with a final “museum exhibition” of all the material so produced.