1. Epigraphica Montenegrina
The road so far and the journey ahead

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Abstract

The project of digitalization of ancient inscriptions from Montenegro started in 2014. At first, it was envisioned as a searchable database of little over 300 Latin inscriptions. At this point, it is presented as a digital corpus and a simple browsing website. But our plan is to broaden the scope of digital presentation, not only to Latin inscription and not only to ancient period.

Keywords

Montenegro, Latin inscriptions, digital corpus, database, images

1.1. The beginnings – project Digitalization of ancient inscriptions from Montenegro

As a junior scholar in the Balkans with limited access to good libraries, I was an ideal end-user of many digital resources available online. I have listened Charlotte Rouche and Gabriel Bodard during a workshop in Berlin in 2005, again during Oxford Epigraphy Conference in 2007, but the huge amount of work done by "some people out there" was beyond any of us. It was not until 2014 that the experimental project of digitalization of ancient inscriptions from Montenegro was funded by Ministry of Culture and started by the Historical Institute of Montenegro. The aim of this project is to create and make freely available online the complete corpus of ancient inscriptions from Montenegro. It was supposed to include texts in Latin language and very few Greek, mostly from the Imperial period. In this initial phase the project is limited to texts engraved on stone, but it is intended to expand that coverage in the future. The project contributes to the preservation and popularization of cultural heritage, as well as the presentation of ancient cultural heritage (Doclea, Risinium, Municipium S) of Montenegro to the world. Although the project was well planned, the funding was not particularly substantial and lack of ICT staff ready to tackle with antiquity is painfully noticeable. On the other hand we do not lack in enthusiasm.

Just a few years ago a corpus of inscriptions from Montenegro was finally published **[Martinović 2011]**, as a traditional paper hard copy. Regrettably it had many shortcomings. It is the main reason why the preliminary work in this project has been done in a very 19th century way. Going through museums, libraries and archives. **[**e.g. **Koprivica 2013]**. A series of cooperation with museums and other institutions was started, focused on autopsy and fresh publication. These past summers we were on-site photographing, measuring, and confirming the readings of the surviving inscriptions for inclusion in the database. We also started collaborations with both the EAGLE project (for the sharing of data) and Trismegistos. One of the main points in this collaboration was sharing images and presenting them on Wikimedia Commons, especially as many inscriptions from this region are still checked from CIL drawings. During these two years many surviving inscriptions were located and photographed with the permission of museums and churches. There are also around 30 newly published inscriptions not listed in EDH or any other database **[Martinović 2011; Pelcer-Vujačić 2014]**. Nevertheless, obstacles are always present. There is no decent lapidarium in any Montenegrin museum, not many curators are interested in

epigraphy (usual question being: isn't epigraphy boring?). Epigraphy, traditional or digital one, is not even in the University curriculum **[Pelcer-Vujačić 2014]**.

Through digital dissemination, the aim of this project was to get into the growing network of digital epigraphy. In order to do this, we choose to follow the principles of the Linked Open Data, using structured data and enabled to connect the digital library to others resources. At first we envisioned this as a searchable database, but it was soon realized that we should first make a digital corpus that uses TEI-XML mark-up, according to the EpiDoc schema and with an exceptional help from EAGLE project members. Development work for our website started in summer of 2015 and hopefully, our corpus will be presented on domain epigraphicamontenegrina.me very soon and available freely online. Although, for the time being it is a simple browsing website, it includes texts, ancient and modern locations as well as photos and translations. Translations are necessary as shown in many discussions and articles **[esp. Bigi (chap.10), Campedelli (chap.11) and Löser (chap. 16) 2014]**, and, as expected, learning some Latin, let alone ancient Greek, is not a main concern in contemporary Montenegrin society. Development work for both the database and the web interface is scheduled to begin next year, and we hope to present a raw version of the database by the end of 2016, early 2017. Hopefully, sooner rather than later, we will also include a discussion blog as an attempt for interpretation of texts and looking for the bigger picture. We have to bear in mind, that there are only around 300 Latin inscriptions (less than ten in Greek) from Montenegro and they could only be perceived as part of the larger corpus of the Roman province of Dalmatia.

1.2. Much more work ahead

We do realize that all this are such baby steps comparing to the work done among other contributors here. Nevertheless, we plan much more.

Montenegro is traditionally viewed as the "cultural melting pot" in the Balkans, and the epigraphic evidence is particularly important for the study of those cultural interactions and the history of the region. Fully aware that any website and digital resource is a permanent "work in progress" we are aiming to upgrade to indexed and searchable database. We believe, in time, this project could become a digital edition of all inscriptions; Greek, Latin,

Islamic, ancient, medieval, showing diversity in all ages. A further upgrade would be to incorporate digitized copies of antiquarian editions of all those Montenegrin inscriptions.

Another goal is to collaborate with Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Culture and try to make an app that will connect our digital corpus with museum guide applications and tourist markings (georeferencing certain inscriptions? QR codes?) as a task to contextualise the document, both in ancient and modern space and period. We hope that part of the corpus will be used in local museum contexts for the purposes of teaching and display. I must admit, I still think as academic end-user, focusing on scholarly purposes. This is why I strongly believe in uploading high quality images and open access. However, for Montenegro, it is important to attract tourists and to enable more easy-access info on ancient cultural heritage and perhaps creating in that way sustainable cultural tourist itineraries.

All the work that has already been done in making this website and future database was also intended as a promotion of cultural heritage in Montenegro. As many of you know and practice, there are many different ways how ancient heritage can be promoted on social networks. The pages dedicated and belonging to archaeological museums and similar institutions are very important as a part of programme on preservation of ancient monuments, as well as profiles that are especially dedicated to that kind of topics. There are many excellent examples in the region and beyond. Cross promotion is another very efficient method to spread published contents throughout web in order to make them available to larger number of social networks users. Our presentation here is also somewhat modest, but we promise to do more.
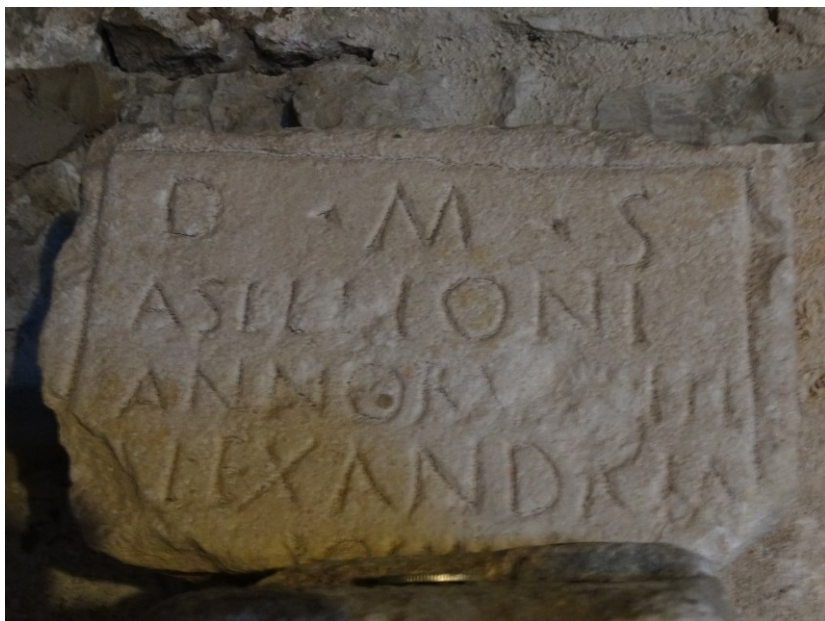
Fig. 1.1. CIL 03, = Martinovic, CILGMontenegri 60

Fig. 1.2. Martinovic, CILGMontenegri 43

Fig. 1.3. The state of inscriptions from Berane, Montenegro

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