



The presence of text monuments and the representation of civic communities in Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor (3rd cent. B.C. – 2nd cent. A.D)

Evelien Roels

One of the most striking features of the cityscape of the ancient city was the conspicuous presence of multiple and varied (groups of) inscriptions in the civic public space on various kinds of buildings, monuments and free-standing blocks of stone like statue bases. This phenomenon applies specifically to the cities of Asia Minor during the Hellenistic and Imperial period, in which the number of surviving texts can be compared with the cities of Rome, Athens and the Vesuvian plain. Such publicly visible texts lent each city a distinct character since they were decided upon and inscribed on behalf of varied groups of people, e.g. the officials of the city or private individuals, to whom the publication of these texts was meaningful. Inscriptions, therefore, form an important source for the representation and self-understanding of civic communities and private individuals, since they materialize the events and values a given person or community wanted to commemorate in the civic space.

A considerable number of these inscriptions was published within an assemblage of texts, inscribed together on particular monuments either during a longer period of time or all at once, thereby making these monuments into 'text monuments'. The inscriptions could greatly differ in subject and seem at times to have been collected out of sheer archival considerations. Other collections however, considering their similarity in content, seem to have been brought together in order to build a dossier for an underlying purpose.

Such 'inscriptions dossiers' can be found on monuments all over Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor, such as the temple of Zeus in Aizanoi, the Delphinion in Milete, the temple of Athena Polias in Priene and the funerary monument of Opramoas in Rhodiapolis. Taken together, these dossiers show noticeable differences in content, quantity, duration of collection, arrangement and reason for publication.

The aim of my project is to bring together such inscription dossiers in a comparative study, in order to examine the developments and changes in the practice of and the reasons for their assemblage during the Hellenistic and Imperial periods. On the one hand, I will focus on the motives that created these dossiers in the first place, studied as a testimony to the self-understanding of the civic community and the private individual. By selecting certain texts for publication on public monuments in the cityscape, civic communities and private individuals singled out events and values they wanted to monumentalize in order to preserve their memory. Additionally, I will explore the question how these text monuments were perceived and whether this perception changed over time.

On the other hand, it is the explicit goal of this project to examine the text of the inscriptions in conjunction with the monument on which they were inscribed, analysing not only the orientation and visibility of the inscription on the monument itself, but also the effect the presence of inscriptions had on the character of the monuments and the surrounding urbanistic environment. Consequently, I will examine the inscriptions in terms of their own agency, since their presence influenced and left its mark on the practical use of the area around them as well.

Combining these approaches and research questions, the project aims at providing a new synthesis of the epigraphic cultures regarding inscription dossiers in Hellenistic and Imperial Asia Minor.