

**The CULTURE project.**  
**The role of writing in cult places in Italy and Gaul**  
**and the impact of Roman epigraphic culture**

Research into religious communication in ancient Western Mediterranean cultures is dominated by an archaeological perspective, as archaeological sources far outnumber epigraphic and literary sources on the subject: dozens of sanctuaries and places of worship have been identified, but **most of them have no epigraphic traces**, or only very minor ones.

However, some cult centres became **real foci of vernacular religious epigraphy**, such as Este or Lagole in Veneto (Fig. 4), Rossano di Vaglio in Lucania (Fig. 5), Pietrabbondante in Samnium, Fondo Patturelli in Campania (Fig. 3), Glanum in Southeastern Gaul (Figs. 1-2), and Peñalba de Villastar in Celtiberia; and **some of them kept on being important epigraphic centres in Roman times**. Most Palaeo-European languages disappeared during the 1st cent. BCE - 1st cent. CE but religious dedications kept on being inscribed in Latin language in certain cult places.



Fig. 1:  
κορηλια ρο/κλοισιαβο / βρατουδεκα(ντ)(εν)  
Altar from Glanum (RIIG, BDR-12-03)



Fig. 2:  
*Auribus / Loreia Pia / Ministra*  
Altar from Glanum (HAW/EDH. © G. Alföldy)

The **CULTURE project** (Appel Impulsion 2023, EFR) is studying the role of writing in such relevant case studies, framing them into their broader archaeological and epigraphic context and trying to answer to some of the following questions:

How can we interpret the **absence and/or scarcity of inscriptions** in most cult places and the **abundance in certain exceptional cases**?

- Census and mapping of pre-Roman cult places with and without inscriptions
- Census and mapping of the inscriptions in cult places, in vernacular languages and Latin.
- Identification of relevant cult places, their nature and chronology.



Fig. 3: Iuvila, Fondo Patturelli, Capua, (Imagines Italicae, Capua 20, © MJET, Museo Provinciale Campano).



Fig. 4: Votive dedication in Venetic and Latin languages from Lagole di Calalzo (Pellegrini, Prosdocimi 1967, Ca 73; Estarán Tolosa 2016, V3. © MJET, authorised by the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività culturali).

Did it depend on how **literate the faithful were** in that context?

- Identification of epigraphic *foci* in the region
- Or on the **presence of specialized craftsmen/writers** in the sanctuaries? Did the local **élites take advantage of the social relevance of cult places** to erect self-commemorating monuments?
- Interpretation of the inscriptions, focussing on the commissioners/authors and on their materiality, trying to find material and palaeographical traces of professional writers (e. g. Lagole)

How did Roman epigraphic habit affect the vernacular use of writing in sanctuaries? Why epigraphy disappears in some cult places while it continues in others? **What are the differences between the vernacular and the Roman period**, as far as the use of writing is concerned?

- Epigraphic landscape of the cult place in Roman times
- Identification of differences and similarities in the materiality, location, content, and deities.



Fig. 5: Monumental inscription in Latin from Rossano di Vaglio naming the local goddess Mefitis (Engfer 2017, n.º 200 © MJET, MAN Potenza).