Armenian inscriptions have proved to be important resources for a broad spectrum of scholarly disciplines within Armenian studies. They allow palaeographers to reach back in time beyond the oldest dated manuscripts, and explore earlier phases in the development of the Armenian script. For philologists, they contain great linguistic potential, affording concrete expression to morphological or phonetic variants whose particular features may not have survived the process of manuscript transmission. For architectural historians, inscriptions can provide a secure date for the construction of a building as well as any later extensions or alterations; they can also reveal who commissioned the building and why. Finally historians have appreciated the contribution that inscriptions can play, both as stable independent controls against which to compare contemporary literary sources and as sources of unique information. They bear

2 See J.J.S. Weitenberg, “Manuscripts and Dialects” in the present volume.
3 T’oramanyan 1942-48; Maranci 2006.
4 For literary comparison, see Greenwood 2004, 62-70. For the social and economic potential of a single inscription (commercial activity in Ani and the exactions levied and exempted), see Mahé 2002a. For a unique political insight, see Kostaneanc’ 1913, 17-18, an inscription at Xckónk’ dated 1033. This confirms that Smbat šahanšah had adopted ‘the beloved boy Sargis’, thereby designating him as his successor, and that Sargis had received high imperial titles, implying Byzantine
witness to the widespread movement of Armenians across time and space, speaking on behalf of remote, and sometimes vanished, diaspora communities.\(^5\)

In many ways, this cross-disciplinary character is very encouraging. Far from being marginalised, Armenian epigraphy has been integrated into a wider intellectual discourse. Inevitably these different disciplines have exploited the large corpus of Armenian inscriptions in particular ways, privileging certain groups or categories or specific features or elements. In their eagerness to bridge the gap of four and a half centuries between the traditional date of the creation of the Armenian alphabet and the earliest dated manuscripts, palaeographers have, quite understandably, studied the letter forms preserved in the oldest securely-dated inscriptions. As the number of dated manuscripts available for study increases century by century, however, interest in Armenian inscriptions, even those contemporary with the manuscripts, has tended to taper off.\(^6\) Philologists too

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approval. The contested succession at the death of Yovhannēs-Smbat III Bagratuni may have had less to do with Byzantine machinations and more to do with Yovhannēs-Smbat simply changing his mind in favour of his nephew Gagik.

\(^5\) See for example Uluhogian 1981. Professor Uluhogian revisited this field at a conference on the Armenian communities of Iran, held in May 2004 at UCLA in the series Historic Cities and Provinces of Armenia. Her paper was titled “Epigraphic Documents as a Source for Studies on Socio-Political life of the Armenians in northern Iran (XVII-XIX Centuries)”. The proceedings of this conference have not yet been published.

\(^6\) Stone, Kouymjian & Lehmann 2002, 78, assert that their palaeographical survey is limited to manuscript writing. Nevertheless they also include illustrations of a selection of
have been attracted to the earliest inscriptions for their morphological and lexicographical particularities. Architectural historians have naturally concentrated upon individual inscriptions which illuminate the history of a building. Conversely historians have begun to study inscriptions collectively, looking for similarities and noting differences across groups which are proximate in date or location. These will inform future research into the social and economic history of medieval Armenia. Inscriptions have also been used to trace patterns of Armenian pilgrimage and settlement beyond the boundaries of historic Armenia.  

It is clear therefore that significant progress has been made in what may be termed applied epigraphy, in other words the contribution which inscriptions can make to research in other disciplines. This has not been accompanied by similar strides in the field of pure epigraphy, that is, the methodical investigation and publication of inscriptions in their own right, irrespective of date, location, content or language, without discrimination or selection on the basis of some general principle or for some particular purpose. This is not to downplay the importance of those studies which have utilised Armenian inscriptions as part of a wider project, for as illustrated below, such publications sometimes provide the only witness to inscriptions which have since been eroded, damaged or destroyed. Nevertheless such publications were never intended to be comprehensive catalogues of Armenian inscriptions, the earliest inscriptions as supplementary evidence; see ills. 2 and 3 and 112-115.

compiled in line with recognised epigraphic standards – although this is how they have sometimes been regarded. In light of the wide range of approaches to selection, transcription and publication, it shall be argued that the full potential of Armenian inscriptions – particularly in the fields of philology and history – has yet to be realised, and that this admittedly ambitious goal requires the rigorous reappraisal of previously published inscriptions. In other words, it is now time to return to, and revive, the discipline of pure Armenian epigraphy. This will in turn both underpin and extend the value, and the use, of inscriptions in other academic disciplines in the future.

Past and Present Studies

There are strong grounds for treating the late thirteenth-century metropolitan and historian Step'annos Orbelel as the “father of Armenian epigraphy”. No other medieval historian recorded and exploited inscriptions in such depth and with such precision, to the extent that it is still possible to compare his readings with surviving inscriptions, notably at Tat'ew. As P. Muradyan has recently demonstrated, it was in the opening decades of the nineteenth century that Armenian inscriptions began to receive sustained attention, prompted and encouraged by Catholicos Nersēs Aštarakc'i. The first studies were usually conducted within wider surveys. Bishop Yovhannēs Šahxat'uneanc' examined inscriptions in the course of his

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8 CIArm II (1960), ed. S.G. Barxudaryan, nos. 1 and 11.
9 Muradyan 2007, 190. Unfortunately Muradyan’s biography of Nersēs Aštarakc'i, published in 2004 and subtitled “the Founder of Armenian Epigraphy”, was not available to me and I was unable to locate a full reference.
research into the Cathedral of Ėǰmiacin and five
neighbouring districts of Ararat whilst M.-F. Brosset’s
interest in epigraphy is revealed both through his
description of his travels in 1847-8 and more
particularly in his subsequent study of Ani.¹⁰ Vardapet
Sargsis Jalaleanc’ published a two-volume account of his
travels across Greater Armenia and this was followed by
N. Sargisean’s painstaking topographical research,
conducted across Lesser and Greater Armenia, and
published in 1864.¹¹ One can see that from the middle of
the nineteenth century, more narrowly focused regional
and site-specific studies began to emerge. The masterly
topographical surveys undertaken by Ł. Ališan, in respect
of Širak, Ayrarat, Sisakan and Sisuan (Cilician Armenia),
illustrate this trend.¹² They merit special mention for
the wealth of epigraphic material that they contain and
for the clarity with which that material is presented.

Thus far, nineteenth-century scholars had utilised
and incorporated Armenian inscriptions in wider scholarly
enterprises. In 1890, N. Marr began his excavations at
Ani. Three years later he published a series of newly-

¹⁰ Şahxatuneanc’ 1842; Brosset 1849-51, whose twelve reports
focus largely upon Georgia and Georgian inscriptions, although
Armenian and Arabic inscriptions are included; Brosset 1860,
which is dominated by epigraphic transcriptions.
¹¹ Jalaleanc’ 1858; Sargisean 1864. Kostaneanc’ 1913 draws
heavily upon both works. Surprisingly there are instances
where Kostaneanc’ does not repeat the full reading published
in the earlier work; compare, for example, the incomplete
inscription dated 1057 from Tat’ew, at Kostaneanc’ 1913, 24,
with the full transcription, at Jalaleanc’ 1858, 303. See now
CIArm II, no. 48.
¹² Ališan 1881; 1885; 1890; 1893; 1993.
discovered inscriptions.\textsuperscript{13} In the course of this publication, he argued forcefully for a more scientific approach to the analysis and publication of inscriptions, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the reading and the proper recording of its linguistic, lexicographical and palaeographical features. Subsequently a series of meetings were convened at which guidelines for the regular publication of inscriptions were finally established and accepted. Marr entrusted one of his pupils, Y. Orbeli, with the task of collating and published seventh-century inscriptions.\textsuperscript{14} Later he charged him with the responsibility for publishing all the epigraphic evidence from Ani. As will be familiar to some, a significant portion of this evidence, including Marr’s own notebooks and many presses and photographs, was lost in transit from St Petersburg to Tiflis, rendering Orbeli’s task that much harder.\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore the Architecture and Epigraphy museum established by Marr at Ani for the collection and preservation of excavated finds was ransacked in 1918 and its contents were smashed or stolen.\textsuperscript{16} At the same time, the archives, survey notes and photographs assembled during the course of Marr’s excavations were destroyed. Although the corpus was completed in the 1920s, it was only published in 1966 as volume 1 of the \textit{Divan Hay Vimagrut'yan} (or \textit{Corpus Inscriptionum Armenicarum}, hereafter “CIArm”), the corpus of Armenian inscriptions envisaged by Marr three-quarters

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13} Marr 1893. \\
\textsuperscript{14} These were eventually collected and published in a single volume: Orbeli 1963. \\
\textsuperscript{15} Muradyan 2007, 196. \\
\textsuperscript{16} Marr 1921, 409-410.
\end{flushright}
of a century before. More shall be said about this series below.

In addition to the pioneering research conducted by Marr, the last decade of the nineteenth century also witnessed a significant contribution to the field of palaeography with the appearance in 1898 of Tašean’s Aknark mǝ hay hnagrut’ean vray [An Overview of Armenian Palaeography: A Study of the Art of Writing of the Armenians]. Tašean devoted an entire section of his study to inscriptions, arguing strongly for the inclusion of photographs in future publications. Although his own work for the most part lacked illustrations, this was remedied fifteen years later with the publication in 1913 of Yovsēp’ean’s K’artēz hay hnagrut’ean [An Album of Armenian Palaeography], which offers little in the way of analysis but reproduces no fewer than 95 plates and 150 illustrations, including thirty-one inscriptions. Although he did not state as much, his evident acceptance of Tašean’s analysis indicates that the two volumes complement one another and ideally should be used together. Yovsēp’ean’s album remains an important collection of early photographs of inscriptions. By contrast, the dedicated study of inscriptions by Kostaneanc’, which appeared in the same year, is not illustrated. This was the first published collection of Armenian inscriptions to be arranged in strictly chronological order. It remains an important reference

18 Tašean 1898, 126-157.
19 Yovsēp’ean 1913.
21 Kostaneanc’ 1913.
work for historians, illustrating the wealth of detail recorded and preserved by inscriptions. However Kostaneanc' had an unfortunate tendency to abbreviate long inscriptions. He also used earlier published readings, whose precision can sometimes be challenged, rather than rechecking each inscription. His study is therefore of limited use from a philological perspective and of no value whatsoever for palaeographers. Historians too should beware.

The general profile of publications across the twentieth century had followed the outline established at the end of the nineteenth century. The corpus of Armenian inscriptions, inspired by Marr and finally published by S.G. Barxudaryan and his team, remains the most significant contribution to the discipline. To date, eight volumes of CIArm have appeared, containing approximately 7000 inscriptions. The first volume catalogues the results of Marr’s sustained studies at Ani; the next five volumes, clustered between 1960 and 1982, record inscriptions from within the borders of the present-day Republic; the two most recent volumes, which appeared in 1996 and 1999, cover Ukraine and Moldova and the Russian Federation respectively. These are

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22 Inscriptions which end with two or three points of ellipsis, indicating intentional omission, are found with surprising frequency throughout Kostaneanc' 1913.
complemented by a host of individual studies, reflecting many different points of departure. Yovsēp’ean’s extended history of the Xaľbakid (Prošean) princes of Vayoc’ Jor included a wealth of epigraphic material. 24 Muradyan published a two-volume catalogue of Armenian inscriptions in Georgia. 25 Karapetyan recorded Armenian inscriptions from historic Aluank’. 26 Łafadaryan published dedicated monographs on the monasteries of Yovhannavank’, Sanahin and Hałbat and their inscriptions. 27 Avagian conducted linguistic and lexicological research using epigraphic evidence whilst Abrahamyan followed in the long tradition of palaeographers in utilising inscriptions in his research. 28 Barxudaryan, Azaryan and Šahinyan, among others, have published studies into xač’k’ars (Armenian funerary crosses), the majority of which carry legible and sometimes dated inscriptions. 29 Gevorgyan analysed lapidary poetry. 30 Furthermore there has been a welcome extension of the definition of “Armenian epigraphy” to include inscriptions in other languages located within Armenia, hence Muradyan’s catalogue of Georgian inscriptions and Xačatrian’s catalogue of Arabic inscriptions. 31 Finally Kalantar’s catalogue of inscriptions from the monastery of Vanstan, completed in

Moldova); CIArm VIII (1999), ed. G.M. Grigoryan (Russian Federation).

24 Yovsēp’ean 1928-43
26 Karapetyan 1997.
30 Gevorgyan 1989.
the second decade of the twentieth century, was finally published eight decades later, in 1999.\textsuperscript{32}

The twenty-first century has seen further important advances. At the time of writing, four volumes of Ayvazyan’s extended study of the epigraphic heritage of Naxijewan have appeared.\textsuperscript{33} Karapetyan’s description of Armenian monuments in Karabakh, subsequently translated into English (Karapetyan 2001), includes a study of their inscriptions, as do his recent studies of Arcax and Ėavaxk', whilst Harut'yunyan has supplied a more detailed study of the city of Šuši.\textsuperscript{34} Gnel Grigoryan has collected and republished the inscriptions recording original and subsequent donations to the churches and monasteries of Ani.\textsuperscript{35} Sałumyan has collated the inscriptions from Aštarak and Totoyan-Baladian has re-examined the inscriptions at Karmirvank'.\textsuperscript{36} Grigor Grigoryan’s introduction to Armenian epigraphy and epigraphers contains a very useful bibliography.\textsuperscript{37} Mahé’s exemplary publication and commentary of the inscriptions of Hoɾomos merits


\textsuperscript{33} Ayvazyan 2004 (Juła); 2005 (Agulis); 2007 (Gołt'n); 2008 (Ernjak Gavar).

\textsuperscript{34} Karapetyan 1999, 2001; Harut’yunyan 2002. See also Karapetyan 2007 (Northern Arcax) and Karapetyan 2008 (Ėavaxk'). Two future studies in the same series (Research on Armenian Architecture Scientific Research Series) appear to be of great significance for Armenian epigraphy. One is provisionally entitled \textit{The Lapidary Inscriptions of Western Armenia} and the other \textit{The Lapidary Inscriptions of Arcax}. See http://www.raa.am/Magazine/Activity/FR_set_E_Activity.htm


\textsuperscript{36} Sałumyan 1998; Totoyan-Baladian 2005-07, 315-332.

\textsuperscript{37} Gr. Grigoryan 2000.
attention. Finally G. Sargsyan won an award in 2005 from the Armenian National Science and Education Fund to prepare the ninth volume in the CIArm series, to cover the inscriptions of the district of Kotayk. Its publication is awaited.

This bibliographical survey scarcely does justice to the considerable achievements of past generations of scholars for it fails to mention, let alone engage with, the numerous articles which contemplate and reassess individual inscriptions. If however one takes a step back from the mass of publications, several challenges to the study of Armenian epigraphy present themselves.

In many respects, the most immediate challenge arising from the above survey concerns the availability of the publications. It is striking that so many nineteenth and early twentieth-century works continue to have such a significant role. Very few libraries however hold these works of reference. Yet those studies which contain photographs of inscriptions which no longer exist or whose condition has deteriorated retain particular importance. Nor is the issue of availability confined to historic publications. Relevant studies and findings have been, and continue to be, published under the auspices of different series and across a bewildering range of academic journals. Monographs and journals alike often have small print runs and can prove difficult to obtain. Despite the best intentions of Marr and others, there is no single corpus of Armenian inscriptions, no definitive catalogue equivalent to the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum or the Inscriptiones Graecae, both started in the nineteenth century but still expanding today. CIL presently extends to 70 volumes and around 180,000

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38 Mahé 2002b.
inscriptions whilst IG runs to 49 volumes and some 50,000 inscriptions. The CIArm series currently extends to eight volumes and 7000 inscriptions but it is worth noting that Ayvazyan’s recent catalogue, in four volumes, has not been published within this series. Nor is there a dedicated journal of Armenian epigraphy for reporting new finds, for publishing revised readings or new interpretations, or even for supplying a bibliography of recent epigraphic publications in other academic journals and essay-collections.\(^{39}\) Anyone who comes to the field of Armenian epigraphy is therefore faced with the daunting prospect of having to track down references scattered across a wide range of publications, recent and historic, some of which will prove hard to locate.

This provides a context for the second challenge. A century ago, Marr and his colleagues devised a series of general principles according to which Armenian inscriptions were to be catalogued and published. These were retained when CIArm finally appeared some fifty years later. In the intervening period - specifically in September 1931 - the Leiden Convention was devised for marking up and reproducing the text of an inscription in a consistent manner.\(^{40}\) It distinguishes what is physically present from what is an editorial addition, interpretation or conjecture. Whilst Marr’s guidelines

\(^{39}\) This is certainly not to say that Armenological journals have ignored epigraphy. To select two of several, both *Patmabanasirakan Handēs* and *Revue des Études Arméniennes* have regularly published such articles. It is simply to observe that presently there is no regular process of bibliographical collation and/or summation of relevant publications.

\(^{40}\) Van Groningen (1932) and Hunt (1932) which form part of the proceedings of the XVIIIᵉ Congrès International des Orientalistes, held at Leiden.
may have been best practice in at the start of the twentieth century, there are good grounds for arguing that the Leiden Convention, used internationally by the vast majority of epigraphers, should have been adopted in CIArm. One of the attractions of the Leiden system of representing inscriptions is that it enables the editor of the text to employ dots beneath those letters which are not complete or clear. Admittedly it does not permit the editor to indicate within the transcription the degree of confidence or otherwise in the proposed reading, thereby introducing a subjective element to the transcription. Nevertheless this continues to be the most widely used system for marking up printed texts of inscriptions.

A third challenge stems from what may be termed “implied certainty”. It is very common for transcriptions and readings of inscriptions to be republished in more recent studies. Indeed it is often possible to trace chains of republished inscriptions, whereby scholar C is found to have derived his reading from scholar B who in turn relied upon the reading originally proposed by scholar A.41 Ideally when scholar D comes to use the reading of scholar C, he or she should also check the two previous readings to confirm that the transcription is consistent. Furthermore, it may be possible to compare the original transcription with a photograph or impression of the inscription and this may confirm the precision of scholar A’s reading. Scholar D will be taking at least three risks, however, in reproducing scholar C’s transcription without making these preliminary checks. The first is that minor errors may

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41 For the prevalence of such chains, see Greenwood 2004, Appendix I, 79-91.
have crept into the transcription at some point along the chain, errors which are then perpetuated. The second is that although the chain of transmission is faultless, the original reading was mistaken. The third is less obvious but no less significant, that postulated or conjectured readings come to be accepted as confirmed or secure. Of course, most publications lack photographs or impressions to accompany the reading of every inscription, for the cost of reproducing black and white plates has always been prohibitive. It is for this reason that epigraphic conventions emerged, permitting scholars to read the inscription as if the original were in front of them. They are then free to interpret it accordingly. Returning to the concrete example, what if scholar A turns out to have offered an approximate reading of the original inscription, an estimation of what it might once have read or perhaps a corrected version of what it did state, with lexicographical, morphological or phonetic peculiarities set aside and replaced with more typical forms, all without comment or acknowledgement? This reading may continue to hold meaning for an historian but its value to the philologist will have been diminished substantially.

In summary, the fragmented and scattered character of Armenian inscriptions is mirrored in their publication record. Armenian inscriptions were first discovered and published by historians, archaeologists, palaeographers and wandering antiquarians. The need for a systematic publication of Armenian inscriptions emerged only later on and was delayed by the tragic events at the start of the twentieth century for a further fifty years. In the interim, anthologies of inscriptions and studies which used inscriptions appeared but these were isolated and intermittent. Eventually when a specific series did
begin, it followed its own principles of transcription rather than the accepted standard, the Leiden convention, which had been devised in the interim. Whilst CIArm itself contains many excellent plates, the drawings are of less value, as they cannot be considered to be independent from the transcription placed alongside. Catalogues and collections continue to be published outside this series, not least of Georgian and Arabic inscriptions located on structures in present-day Armenia. The thorny problem of republication has also surfaced, with readings deemed to be secure rather than confirmed as such. Whilst the impact may be minimal for architectural historians or philologists, it may be decisive for a philologist.

Overall, Armenian inscriptions have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention over the last two centuries and that is a considerable achievement. It should be noted however that this attention has not been lavished equally. A small group of inscriptions – especially those early medieval inscriptions with palaeographical significance – have been privileged and studied repeatedly. With some notable exceptions, the majority of inscriptions languish in relative obscurity and isolation. Another way of approaching the corpus of Armenian inscriptions is to think less about how they have been exploited or the degree of scholarly interest in them and instead to examine them from a purely epigraphic angle, and specifically in terms of the accuracy and precision of transcription. Even a cursory study is sufficient to reveal that this varies considerably, largely depending upon when and by whom the

42 See Tašean 1898, 126-157; Abrahanyan 1973, 80-88; Manuč'aryan 1977, 48-106.
original reading was made. Some readings can be compared against the inscription itself or a photograph of it. Others remain incapable of such corroboration; they have been preserved only via a transcription made by a travelling scholar who was inspired to sketch or note down what he saw. In the light of what has been achieved in the field of Armenian epigraphy by previous generations of scholars, what should be the priorities for future research?

*Future Directions*

The above survey demonstrates not only that the study of Armenian inscriptions has a long history but also that it continues to be an active theatre of academic research, with a number of scholars involved in a series of projects which have generated substantial and significant publications over the course of the last decade. It might therefore seem somewhat presumptuous for someone who has not been engaged in those projects to be outlining the way ahead for the field as a whole. The following should be treated as suggestions; they are certainly not intended to be prescriptions. They range from clearly defined, smaller scale but realistic projects, which could be completed within a fixed time period, to one more ambitious, more complex — and inevitably more expensive — project, which would be open-ended and on-going. Despite their obvious differences, collectively they seek to address the two principal challenges articulated previously, namely accessibility of publication and accuracy of transcription.

One of the ways in which the challenge of accessibility could be addressed would be to establish a website containing digital versions of relevant historic
publications. As noted previously, many of these publications are rare and most library collections are incomplete. By scanning these publications and uploading them onto an open free-to-use website, they would become widely available to all who wished to consult them. Priority should be afforded to those publications which contain photographs or impressions of the inscriptions. This will enable comparison to be made with both original transcriptions and subsequent republications. It should be acknowledged that many of these publications are already available commercially, on microfiche from the Inter Documentation Company. Issues of copyright would therefore need to be resolved beforehand. Ideally this process of digitization should be extended to all those publications which comprise catalogues or anthologies of Armenian inscriptions. This would therefore include the existing eight volumes of CIArm as well as the most recently-published catalogues, again on condition that the necessary consents from the holders of the copyright had been obtained. It could also include photographs from unpublished archives.

As presently envisaged, this project would create a digitized corpus of Armenian inscriptions, assembled on the basis of existing publications. The key question is: what next? In many ways, the obvious next step would be create and store meta-data about the inscriptions – including the date of the inscription, its content, its location – thereby enabling the database to become fully searchable. Such an exercise however would be based on the presumption that all the published transcriptions and readings were of equal precision. Unfortunately it is not

43 Those of Josef Strzygowski, Nicolai Marr and T'oros T'oramanyan for example; see Maranci 2001, vii and 74 n. 87 and Baladian 2002.
possible to make that assumption. Creating a searchable database by relying upon existing publications alone would be effectively to republish the old readings yet again, this time in electronic form, without differentiating between precise and vague or mistaken transcriptions. To expend further time and resources on such a database beyond scanning the relevant publications would not be prudent, for it would not address the second challenge, namely confirming or repudiating the accuracy of a transcription. An alternative approach will be outlined below.

If the above attempts to resolve the problem of availability of past publications, a separate initiative is needed for recent and future publications. Catalogues and anthologies need to be available for research libraries and specialists to acquire. One solution would be to have a webpage devoted to new and recent publications in the field, listing catalogues, journal articles and relevant publications in related disciplines. This would need to be updated regularly and include details of how such publications might be obtained. More generally, it would be extremely helpful if future catalogues of inscriptions could be folded into CIArm, in the sense of being allocated a specific volume number within the series. Although more difficult to accomplish, it might also be possible to do the same for historic catalogues as well. This would have the effect of consolidating all the catalogues into a single series. Admittedly this would produce inconsistencies in terms of transcription between the individual volumes, but the same is also true of IG and CIL. The webpage would be a natural location for this process of incorporation to occur, enabling a virtual series number to be allocated
whilst at the same time allowing past and newly published volumes to be differentiated.

It should also be recognised that the corpus of Armenian inscriptions is continuing to expand. Not all structures across historic Armenia have been surveyed with equal rigour, as the surprising discovery in 2007 of at least three new, unpublished inscriptions at the very well-known church at Ptlini illustrates. These finds may be indicative of a hitherto unrecognized need, to re-examine even familiar sites from a strictly epigraphic perspective. Future studies of historic sites should include an epigraphic reassessment, exploring the state of those inscriptions which have previously been published and taking photographs of them in their present condition, and searching for otherwise unknown inscriptions whose existence has previously been overlooked. These new finds too could be posted on a discussion board on a website, to which access could be limited to members of a group of epigraphers.

All three projects outlined above – the scanned historic publications; the advertisement of new publications; the discovery and deciphering of newly-found inscriptions – involve web-based publication. It would therefore make greatest sense for all three elements to be combined on a single website, conceivably bearing the title “Epigraphica Armeniaca”.

Unfortunately

44 Private communications between the author and Dr Jasmine Dum Tragut between 29 July and 1 October 2007; and between the author and Dr Christina Maranci between 17 and 20 September 2007.


46 The author acknowledges the influence of the series of ten articles published by Stone and others in REArm which bear the
there is already a page on the photo-sharing site Flickr bearing the title “Epigraphie Arménienne – Armenian Epigraphy”. This offers an eclectic array of images but lacks any commentary or analysis.

The second principal challenge is centred upon establishing the accuracy of every transcription. This of course is a much bigger task. It would require a close study of every published inscription with a view to confirming the existing reading, suggesting appropriate corrections or acknowledging that the transcription is no longer capable of corroboration following the disappearance of the original inscription and in the absence of any photographic record. One could envisage the corpus of Armenian inscriptions being devised not on chronological or regional grounds, as previously, but rather on the basis of the precision or otherwise of the transcription. Admittedly this would be a very ambitious project but it could provide the impetus as well as the justification for an entirely new corpus of Armenian inscriptions. If one were to start again from scratch, what form would that new corpus take?

It is obvious that such a large volume of data is best suited to an electronic environment. Conventional volumes of inscriptions are very expensive to print and are not commercially attractive. Moreover they are singular publications which can take many years to complete. By contrast, a digital epigraphic corpus can be rolled out progressively, in stages, as separate sections of the overall project are completed. Publication is therefore gradual, cumulative and ongoing, not a single

similar title “Epigraphica Hierosolymitana Armeniaca”; see Stone 2005–07 and Ervine & Stone 2005–07 for the two most recent studies.

47 See http://www.flikr.com/groups/710019@N25.
definitive event. Furthermore, a digital database of inscriptions permits easy revision and/or addition, thereby avoiding the need for later supplements which are often isolated from the original publication.

What features should a digital database of Armenian epigraphy possess? Ideally it should be a freely accessible, flexible and searchable archive, in which every inscription receives similar scholarly treatment. Every entry should comprise an edited text, which has been marked-up using an internationally-regarded convention. The entry should also include a description of the location of the inscription, an English translation of the text, a scholarly commentary highlighting particular features and properties of the text, a history of the discovery, study and interpretation of the inscription, a bibliography and a photograph, all with sufficient meta-data to enable comparison across the corpus. More broadly the database should be compatible with other published standards. It should employ a platform-independent language suitable for delivering content over the web. It should seek to avoid high maintenance costs or, more seriously, the risks of obsolescence and incompatibility.

At first glance, this would appear to be a wildly overambitious proposal, beset with considerable technical challenges which would need to be overcome. It is not hard to envisage a situation in which funding is secured but then exhausted before a single inscription is entered into the database. In the alternative, one could imagine a mass of data being inputted before the construction of the database is complete, resulting in an electronic resource which is never fully functioning. Neither is an attractive proposition. It is therefore with considerable relief that one finds that similar challenges have
already been encountered in Greek and Latin epigraphy and successfully overcome using the EpiDoc principles, techniques and tools.\textsuperscript{48}

EpiDoc is an abbreviation for Epigraphic Documents in Extensible Markup Language (XML) along the guidelines established in the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI). XML is a software-independent and platform-independent language which means that it is ideal for archive storage, and web and database publication. EpiDoc emerged originally in response to a manifesto issued by a meeting of the Association Internationale d’Épigraphie Grecque et Latine convened in Rome in May 1999 which recommended ‘the establishment of an on-line free and unrestricted database of all surviving Greek and Latin epigraphical texts produced down to the end of Antiquity’. This commitment to free and unrestricted access is enshrined as one of five general principles which have governed the growth and development of EpiDoc from the outset:

“EpiDoc and its tools should be open and available to the widest possible range of individuals and groups; therefore all documents and software produced by the EpiDoc Community are released under the GNU General Public License”.\textsuperscript{49}

In other words, the software and tools are already freely available and accessible but only on the condition that the databases which are constructed through them are equally open and available. This tallies with one of the desiderata outlined above, that the proposed corpus

\textsuperscript{48} See http://epidoc.sourceforge.net/ for a full definition of EpiDoc, its past history, its present projects and the EpiDoc resources and tools available for download.

\textsuperscript{49} See http://epidoc.sourceforge.net/ for the five principles, of which this is the first.
should not be for profit and no subscription should be levied.

This general survey of Armenian epigraphy is not the place to rehearse the technical specifications of EpiDoc in meticulous detail. Nevertheless at this stage some general observations may be advanced which collectively support the proposition that any future electronic corpus of Armenian inscriptions should adopt EpiDoc. Most importantly, EpiDoc has been designed by epigraphers and computer programmers for epigraphers.\(^{50}\) It is not a modified version of an earlier framework intended for another use. Rather it operates as ‘a mechanism for the creation of complete digital epigraphic editions and corpora’. The guidelines for marking up texts in TEI reveal meticulous attention to detail whilst the resources and tools necessary for the formation, distribution and proper functioning of an EpiDoc project are carefully explained and easily downloaded. Secondly, far from being merely an aspiration or even a work in progress, EpiDoc has been tried and tested already, through fourteen separate projects based in universities and research institutes across Europe and the United States. Several of these, including the *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* (*IAph*) project located at Kings College London, have been completed.\(^{51}\) Others are in the course of preparation. These include the *Etruscan Texts Project* located at the University of Massachusetts Amherst; the *Latin Inscriptions of Albania* project located at the Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik of the Deutches Archäologisches Institut in Munich; and the

\(^{50}\) Several articles on the technical aspects of EpiDoc have been published, most recently Bodard 2008.

\(^{51}\) Project website at [http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007](http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007)
Pandektes project located at the Institute of Greek and Roman Antiquity within the National Hellenic Research Foundation. EpiDoc workshops and so-called “sprints” have also been organised, the latter being events for intensive collaborative computer programming and/or content development. This commitment to dissemination and development is impressive. Thirdly EpiDoc is clearly at the cutting edge of present research in the fields of Greek and Latin epigraphy. It represents best practice. The fourteen projects mentioned above have attracted funding from a wide range of sources, each of which has been satisfied by the advantages claimed by the EpiDoc community. EpiDoc therefore holds out to the field of Armenian epigraphy the exciting prospect of constructive engagement and integration with the fields of Greek and Latin epigraphy. It offers an opportunity for scholars of Armenian epigraphy to introduce Armenian inscriptions to the wider epigraphic community and to participate in an international collaborative enterprise at a formative stage. Finally, although no Armenian inscription has yet appeared in an EpiDoc project, the development of Armenian Unicode in 2004 with funding from UNESCO has ensured that a digital corpus of Armenian inscriptions is now feasible.


There have been thirteen EpiDoc workshops held in Europe and the United States between 2005 and 2012 and six more workshops are scheduled to run between April and October 2013, with nine others proposed under consideration. See http://wiki.digitalclassicist.org/EpiDoc_Summer_School

See also Telfeyan 2008 for a timely introduction to Armenian Unicode.
Conclusion

This brief survey suggests that much has been done with Armenian inscriptions in the last two centuries; perhaps less has been done for Armenian epigraphy. It is currently undergoing something of a revival, with major publications from a number of scholars. In many ways the discipline is at a crossroads familiar across the humanities: to digitize or not to digitize and if so, how? Unlike many fields, however both the theoretical guidelines and the necessary software have already been generated and, almost without precedent, are freely available. Given this open invitation, the only substantive question is who should seize this opportunity and assume responsibility for a digital corpus of Armenian inscriptions.

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